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Security Council

Sixty-seventh year

Provisional

6816th meeting
Wednesday, 25 July 2012, 10.15 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Osorio	(Colombia)
Members:	Azerbaijan	Mr. Musayev
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Araud
	Germany	Mr. Wittig
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	India	Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Tarar
	Portugal	Mr. Moraes Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Sangqu
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Australia, Brazil, Canada, Cuba, Egypt, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to participate in this meeting.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 24 July 2012 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2012/574 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council which will be held on Wednesday, 25 July 2012, on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

It is so decided.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Serry.

Mr. Serry: Let me at the outset join the Secretary-General and the Council in condemning in the strongest possible terms the deadly terror attack on 18 July against a bus carrying Israeli tourists outside the Burgas airport in Bulgaria. The explosion, reportedly executed by a suicide bomber, killed six civilians, five of them Israeli and one Bulgarian, and injured more than 30 people, several critically. We extend our condolences to the families of the victims and wish a speedy recovery to the injured. That heinous act provides a reminder, as noted by the Quartet on the Middle East in its statement on 19 July, of the need for the members of the international community to stand side by side in the effort to prevent terrorism wherever it may be practiced. The Quartet also reaffirmed its commitment to continuing efforts to reach a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement in the Middle East, where all people may live in peace and security.

In that regard, the past month has been characterized by a continuation of the effort to restart talks amid continued worrying developments on the ground. Quiet, direct exchanges between the parties are ongoing in an attempt to reach agreement on a package of measures that would create an environment conducive to talks and pave the way for high-level contacts.

President Abbas has emphasized the importance of a release of Palestinian prisoners arrested before the Oslo accords were agreed. He has also underlined the critical importance of Israel's allowing the delivery of weapons and ammunition intended for the Palestinian security forces that are held in Jordan. It is vital that such steps be taken to enable a continuation of effective security coordination. More generally, it is concerning that we have not seen urgently needed enabling steps or other measures that would bolster the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Quartet envoys have remained in close contact with each other and the parties, and a number of high-level visits have taken place. On 25 and 26 June, Russian President Vladimir Putin held meetings in Israel and with President Abbas in Bethlehem. United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also visited Israel

on 16 and 17 July, and on 6 July met with President Abbas in Paris, where the Palestinian President also met with French President Hollande, European Union High Representative Ashton, and United Kingdom Foreign Secretary Hague. The Arab League Follow-up Committee held consultations in Doha on 22 July, in which it supported a Palestinian approach to the United Nations to seek further recognition without specifying a timeline.

In sum, the effort to restart direct talks has not reached a breaking point, but there has not been a breakthrough either, and that is increasingly of concern. While talks remain stalled, events on the ground continue to move in the wrong direction.

To begin with, the Palestinian Authority faces an acute challenge in maintaining its solvency. At the start of the year, the Authority announced that it owed $1.1 billion in bank loans and $400 million to the private sector. In addition, it expects a $1-billion shortfall in funding towards its $3.5-billion budget for 2012. At the start of July, the Palestinian Finance Minister announced that the Palestinian Authority could not pay all June salaries to its 150,000 employees on time. Last week, Saudi Arabia announced a contribution of $100 million. This is positive news that has provided the Palestinian Authority with a welcome respite, including by allowing it to pay the June salaries, but it will be brief.

We call on other donors, particularly other Gulf countries, to consider making a timely donation during this period of critical shortage. We have also repeatedly pointed to the need for an improved mechanism for the transfer of the VAT revenues Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority to enhance transparency and efficiency. Last week, Israeli authorities transferred half of the monthly VAT collection to the PA two weeks early in order to assist with the payment of salaries ahead of the holy month of Ramadan.

On 17 July, Israel approved 5,000 permits for Palestinian construction workers to work in Israel, in addition to the 34,250 permits that have already been issued for Palestinian workers to work there. This initiative is welcome, but more needs to be done to ease access and movement and enable economic growth throughout the West Bank, including Area C, the Jordan Valley and Gaza. In Gaza, next steps must include enabling exports to Israel and other countries, as well as transfers to and from the West Bank. This will in turn enable economic growth and, in addition, provide much needed additional revenue through taxation for the Palestinian Authority.

Settlement announcements continued this month, with the Israel Land Authority publishing tenders for 171 new settlement units in East Jerusalem, 41 in Pisgat Ze'ev, and 130 units in Har Homa. Additionally, 13 Palestinian structures, including three residences, were demolished in the West Bank during the reporting period, leading to the displacement of 20 Palestinians, including seven children. We are also concerned about recent reports that the Israeli Minister of Defence has ordered the demolition of eight Palestinian villages near Hebron so that the area can be used for military training.

On 18 July, a Higher Education Committee nominated by the Israeli military commander of the West Bank approved an application by a college in the settlement of Ariel, which is deep in the West Bank, to upgrade its status to that of university. While still pending approval, such an upgrade would considerably increase Government funding, resulting in an increase in enrolment, which now stands at 12,000 students. This represents a further encroachment into the West Bank and runs counter to Israel's road map obligations to freeze settlement activity, including natural growth.

At the same time, a committee led by retired Supreme Court Justice Edmond Levy and commissioned by the Israeli Government to provide recommendations on "the status of the construction" in the West Bank submitted its report to the Prime Minister on 9 July. The report claimed that the Israeli presence in the West Bank was not a military occupation, recommended post-facto approval of outposts which the Israeli legal system deems illegal, and proposed changes to the process of approving settlement construction. The Israeli Government has not endorsed the report, but such proposals are in direct contradiction to international law. I reiterate that any settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is contrary to international law and Israel's commitments under the road map, and should stop. As the Quartet has stated on numerous occasions, any Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank cannot prejudge the outcome of negotiations and will not be recognized by the international community.

As in previous reporting periods, clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians have continued. Settlers

attacked Palestinians near Hebron on 30 June, and Nablus was the site of clashes during Israeli visits to Joseph's Tomb on 21 June and 18 July. Settler attacks on Palestinian property, including agricultural land and orchards, also continued, resulting in over 1,000 trees being damaged.

Palestinian attacks on Israelis in the West Bank, mostly consisting of stone-throwing at Israeli vehicles, also continued, resulting in one Israeli injury on 11 July. On 27 June, a Palestinian was shot and injured by an Israeli security guard at the entrance of the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim after allegedly hitting an Israeli police car with his vehicle. On 17 July, a Palestinian was arrested for attacking an Israeli girl in Area C.

Citing security, Israeli security forces conducted 477 operations in the West Bank, which was an increase from previous months, resulting in 185 Palestinians, including eight children, being injured, while two Israeli soldiers were also injured. A total of 246 Palestinians were arrested, including a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council affiliated with Hamas, on 15 July. On 9 July, a Jerusalem court sentenced two former Israeli police officers to 30 months in prison for the negligent death of a Palestinian in 2008.

Most Palestinians injuries and arrests during the reporting period took place during demonstrations against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. A Palestinian demonstration in Ramallah on 30 June against a planned meeting between President Abbas and then Deputy Prime Minister of Israel Shaul Mofaz resulted in clashes with Palestinian security forces. Although the meeting was canceled, demonstrations continued for two more days to protest the use of force by Palestinian police. I would like to again stress that the right of peaceful protest must be upheld and that all protests should be kept strictly non-violent.

Palestinian security forces continued to work to maintain law and order in the West Bank. The Palestinian security operation that started in Jenin in May in the northern West Bank continues. More than 150 suspects have been apprehended, including members of Palestinian security forces. On 30 June, a senior Fatah member was shot and injured in Jenin. On 8 July, Prime Minister Fayyad inaugurated the Palestine College for Police Sciences in the presence of the President of the European Commission.

On a positive note, as part of the 14 May agreement to end the mass prisoner hunger strike, on 16 July 48 relatives from the Gaza strip were allowed to visit 25 detainees in Israeli prisons, and on 23 July 33 relatives visited 27 detainees. There are more than 500 detainees from Gaza in Israeli prisons. This was the first time since 2007 that such family visits from Gaza had taken place. Four detainees have continued their hunger strikes. In the West Bank, on 19 July Israeli authorities released the Speaker of the Palestinian Parliament, Aziz Dweik, who had been held for six months under administrative detention.

Internal political dynamics remain fluid. On 17 July, the Kadima party led by Shaul Mofaz left Prime Minister Netanyahu's coalition after two months in the Government. Kadima's decision to leave the coalition emerged after disagreements on the renewal of a law regarding the military service of the Jewish Haredi community. The creation of the large coalition in May had stirred expectations for renewed momentum regarding the peace process.

On the Palestinian side, efforts to advance reconciliation were again delayed when the de facto authorities in Gaza decided to suspend the voter registration process that the Central Elections Commission had planned for 3 to 14 July. We have voiced our clear disappointment with this decision and continue to believe that the democratic renewal of institutions in the occupied territories is long overdue. On 10 July, the Palestinian Authority, pending further developments on reconciliation, called for municipal elections to be held throughout the occupied territories on 20 October. This has been rejected by Hamas. During my recent visit to Egypt on 25 and 26 June, just days after Mohamed Morsy was announced as Egypt's next President, I received firm assurances from the Egyptian authorities of their continued efforts to reach reconciliation. President Abbas met with President Morsy on 18 July, and Hamas leader Khaled Meshal met the Egyptian President the following day. We continue to support such efforts through Egyptian auspices, under the leadership of President Abbas and within the framework of the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the positions of the Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative.

I visited Gaza from 2 to 5 July, and was again struck by the fragility and unsustainability of the present situation, which has lead to unacceptable hardship for the local population. That is partially

explained by growing funding challenges for United Nations operations. For example, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) currently requires an additional $57 million to meet the shortfall in its core operating budget, covering all of its operations, and an additional $168 million to fully fund the emergency appeal, including the provision of food aid to almost 700,000 vulnerable refugees in the West Bank and Gaza. Most urgent is the funding of $7.5 million to meet food procurement distribution needs in Gaza for 2012. That funding shortfall has already resulted in the cancellation of UNRWA's Summer Games for the children of Gaza and, if not addressed, will result in cuts to essential UNRWA programming across the occupied Palestinian territory.

United Nations reconstruction work in Gaza, which now totals $360 million, has had a positive effect not only for those who receive services but also on short-term employment. However, the economic benefits of increased employment will end with the conclusion of that work. Deeper and more fundamental change is therefore required to enable a functioning Gazan economy, beginning with authorizing exports to Israel and other countries, as well as transfers to and from the West Bank. Without that essential step, Gaza's future will remain tenuous at best. In addition, I urge donors to continue to fund United Nations reconstruction work in Gaza through the Palestinian Authority-United Nations Trust Fund. I also urge the Government of Israel to continue to grant approvals for outstanding United Nations reconstruction work in the Gaza Strip, and emphasize once more that there should be a broader opening for the entry of all construction materials into Gaza.

The violence in Gaza, which resumed in early June, has continued. A total of 183 projectiles fired from Gaza landed in Israel, including 27 Grad rockets and 21 mortar shells. Several rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome system. Heavy machine gun shots were also fired from Gaza at a commercial plaza in southern Israel on 9 July, without casualties. The Israel Defense Forces conducted six incursions and 31 airstrikes into Gaza, resulting in nine Palestinians killed, including six militants and three civilians, while 54 Palestinians were injured, including 24 militants and 30 civilians. We continue to condemn such indiscriminate rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel and call for their complete cessation. We also urge Israel to show maximum restraint.

On 17 July, the de facto Ministry of Interior in Gaza executed by hanging three Palestinians convicted of murder, in violation of the Palestinian legal framework that requires prior ratification by the President. Six death sentences have been implemented in Gaza since the beginning of 2012, and 14 since 2007. That runs counter to the worldwide moratorium on the death penalty called for by the General Assembly.

On a separate issue that relates to United Nations relations with Israel, I wish to report that, on 10 July, the Permanent Representative of Israel sent a letter to Under-Secretary-General Amos inquiring about the status of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and its activities in the occupied Palestinian territory. The United Nations will work with the Government of Israel to address the issues and explain the important work of OCHA in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Now allow me to turn to regional events. The Council heard extensive briefings on the escalating violence in Syria last week, and will receive further briefings next week. I will therefore limit my remarks to emphasizing that the Secretary-General remains extremely concerned by the violence in Syria and by the rising death toll, as well as by the continuing human rights abuses and growing humanitarian needs. Each day brings to light new atrocities and new suffering. Reports of the aerial bombardment of eastern parts of the city of Aleppo yesterday add to our serious concerns about the dangerous escalation currently in play.

We are aware of the reports related to the possible relocation of alleged chemical weapon stockpiles in Syria, and to concerns raised about the risk of their possible use. The Secretary-General has emphasized the fundamental responsibility of the Government of Syria in ensuring the safety and security of those stockpiles, which absolutely must not be used under any circumstances. The Secretary-General has noted with concern that Syria is not a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We condemn all violence in Syria, which has cost thousands of lives. That situation cannot continue. The Secretary-General urges all concerned to immediately stop the fighting and take steps towards a Syrian-led transition that will address the genuine aspirations and needs of the Syrian people. Ending violence and

seeking a peaceful resolution of the crisis in Syria will remain at the centre of our efforts.

The situation in Syria is increasingly also impacting the region. Council members will recall that, on 19 July, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations informally communicated information regarding the entry and operations of armed Syrian security forces, including soldiers, inside the area of separation of the area of operation of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), on 18 and 19 July. Since then, security operations by Syrian armed forces have continued, mostly in Jabbata and Trunje. The numbers of armed forces involved in those operations has varied from 47 up to 396. UNDOF reported heavy gunfire and many explosions in Jabbata, Al-Baath and Trunje. UNDOF has lodged its protest with the Syrian authorities, as the entry of Syrian armed forces and equipment in the area of separation is a violation of the Agreement of Disengagement between the Israeli and Syrian forces. In addition, UNDOF has reported seeing a total of approximately 100 civilians aboard vehicles and on foot with personal belongings heading east through the Bravo line. UNDOF will continue to liaise with Israeli and Syrian military authorities to prevent an escalation of tension.

Nowhere else, perhaps, does the impact of the Syrian crisis loom larger than in Lebanon. As recently as last week, following a briefing by the Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Mr. Derek Plumby, the Council, in a press statement on 18 July, expressed grave concern over repeated incidents of cross-border fire, incursions, abductions and arms trafficking across the Lebanese-Syrian border. The Council reiterated the importance of full respect for Lebanon's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and the authority of the Lebanese State. In that context, Council members welcomed President Sleiman's initiative to reconvene the national dialogue of Lebanon's political leaders and the declarations following the first two meetings last month, stating that they looked forward to the continuation of his process.

Since then, a pattern of Syrian army violations of the Lebanese-Syrian border has continued, including intermittent shelling from Syria into Wadi Khaled. In response, the Government has deployed additional troops of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to its northern border and authorized the LAF to fire back. New cross-border incidents have been reported since, including on 21 July in the area of Al-Qa'a, in the north-east of the Beka'a Valley, involving machine-gun and rocket-propelled grenade fire and a brief incursion by Syrian soldiers. In addition to the almost 30,000 Syrian refugees registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the surge in the number of Syrians crossing into Lebanon last week was estimated at some 18,000 over a two-day period, many of whom have travelled back into Syria. UNHCR is updating its contingency plan in the event of a mass or increased influx requiring a comprehensive humanitarian response.

Lebanon has also continued to face significant challenges to its security and stability domestically, linked directly or indirectly to the crisis in Syria. Incidents in different parts of the country reflect confessional tensions exacerbated by the conflict in Syria. On 18 July, following the bomb attack in Damascus, fresh clashes erupted between groups from Sunni and Alawite neighbourhoods in Tripoli. That coincided with a speech by Hezbollah leader Nasrallah reiterating support for the Syrian regime. As for the national dialogue, the opposition March 14 coalition decided to boycott its third session, scheduled for yesterday. President Sleiman has announced that the process is postponed until 16 August. It is hoped that the obstacles to continuing the national dialogue will be overcome in order to allow the next session to take place as planned. As stressed by the Council, the commitment of the country's leaders to safeguarding Lebanon from the impact of regional tensions at this difficult time is particularly important.

Meanwhile, the situation in the UNIFIL area of operation has remained cautiously calm and stable. As the Lebanese Armed Forces deployed some troops out of the south Litani sector to reinforce its efforts along the north-eastern border, UNIFIL increased operational activities in its area. The Lebanese Armed Forces assured UNIFIL that this is a temporary measure and that troops would be sent back to the south as soon as the situation allowed. Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace, meanwhile, have continued on an almost daily basis.

In conclusion, I am addressing the Council today only two months before the General Assembly's general debate, in September, and almost a year since the Council was presented with the Palestinian application for membership in the United Nations. When I was last before the Council, in May, I warned that we were increasingly moving away from a two-State solution

towards a one-State reality that would also diminish the prospects for regional peace in the spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative.

The continuous negative trends, as reported today and in previous briefings, just further manifest the reality that consistently undermines our common goal of a negotiated two-State solution that will end the conflict and end the occupation that started in 1967. The international community should understand that, absent a credible political horizon for the establishment of a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel, its own efforts in pursuit of that goal will increasingly lack credibility. The parties must now do their part to overcome admittedly difficult obstacles and take the steps necessary to enable an environment conducive to serious engagement. But I fear that time is running out.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Serry for his comprehensive briefing to the Council.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour: On behalf of Palestine, I congratulate you, Mr. President, and your country, Colombia, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We are fully confident in your leadership. I also wish to express appreciation to the People's Republic of China for its wise stewardship of the Council last month. And I thank Special Coordinator Robert Serry for his comprehensive briefing today.

Three months ago, I addressed the Council (see S/PV.6757) on behalf of Palestine and conveyed our grave concerns regarding the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as a result of the continuation of Israeli crimes and violations against the Palestinian people, their land and property.

We regret that positive developments on the ground cannot be reported at this time, as we continue to find ourselves in a situation that has precariously worsened at all levels and further distanced us from the goal that we all share, namely, to end Israel's more than 45-year military occupation in order to realize the two-State solution of Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

Nothing takes us farther away from that internationally endorsed goal for peace than the continuation of Israel's illegal settlement campaign, which is being waged in a deliberate attempt to seize more Palestinian land and entrench Israeli control over the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. That is the matter on which I will focus my statement, based on our hope of compelling the international community to finally take serious and practical action aimed at stopping Israel, the occupying Power, from completely destroying the viability of the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders and reviving the prospects for soon achieving the long overdue just, lasting and peaceful settlement that we all have been seeking and working towards.

Yet, before focusing on the destructive, illegal Israeli settlement campaign in our land, I must once again draw the Council's attention to the many other illegal actions and measures that continue also to be taken by the occupying Power against the Palestinian civilian population living under its ruthless occupation.

During the recent period, Israel forged ahead with the demolition of Palestinian homes and civilian infrastructure, resulting in further displacement of families in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Today's comprehensive statement by Mr. Serry testified about many of the details regarding those issues.

Israel has also continued to carry out daily military raids throughout Palestinian villages, towns and cities, arresting more and more Palestinian civilians and thereby adding to the thousands of Palestinians already imprisoned or detained, including hundreds of children. In that connection, we reiterate our grave concern about the deplorable treatment to which Palestinian civilians in Israeli jails and detention centres continue to be subjected, including degrading, inhumane and unhygienic captivity conditions, severe humiliation and mental and physical ill-treatment, including acts of torture, denial of family visits, denial of access to proper medical care and education and denial of due process of law.

We recall the plight of the many Palestinian prisoners, including those under administrative detention without charge or trial, who have carried out prolonged hunger strikes in non-violent, peaceful protest of that cruel treatment by the occupying Power. We call on the international community to act to compel Israel to cease those illegal practices and to release all of the Palestinian civilians it is illegally imprisoning.

Israel has also continued to carry out military attacks via missile air strikes and artillery bombardment of civilian areas in the besieged Gaza Strip, in grave violation of international law, including the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. In that regard, Israel has continued to deliberately target and kill Palestinian civilians, thereby persisting with its deliberate policy of extrajudicial executions.

In the month of June alone, at least 15 Palestinians, including 3 children, were killed and scores were injured by Israeli military attacks against the Gaza Strip. In addition to living in constant fear of such military attacks, the population of the Gaza Strip continues to suffer grave hardship as a result of the inhumane blockade imposed since June 2007 by the occupying Power, which has now entered into its sixth year. The cruel blockade clearly constitutes collective punishment of the over 1.6 million Palestinian civilians living there, more than half of them children, in a deliberate and grave breach of international law, specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the occupying Power from collectively punishing protected persons and prohibits pillaging and reprisals against them and their property. In that regard, I am referring to article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and article 50 of The Hague Regulations, which are recognized by the international community as customary international law. The blockade is also a violation of the population's basic human rights.

The international community must not relent in demanding that Israel, the occupying Power, act in accordance with its obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 1860 (2009), to end the blockade of Gaza and to cease its human rights violations and bring an end to the travesty against our people.

With the myriad of human rights violations committed by the occupying Power on a daily basis, it is a challenging task to keep our statement focused on one issue. However, it is unquestionably clear that the continuation of illegal Israeli settlement activities and the vast network of related infrastructure, including more than 500 internal checkpoints, roadblocks and other physical obstacles, which exist primarily to "protect" the illegal settlers and facilitate their movement while impeding Palestinian movement and all aspects of life in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are the largest obstacles to peace.

Since the Council's last debate on this issue in April (see S/PV.6757), Israeli announcements of settlement building have continued unabated, inflaming tensions and mistrust, further poisoning the environment and undermining any prospects for the revival of a negotiated peace process. Throughout that time, Palestine has submitted numerous letters informing the Security Council of Israel's gross violations and appealing to the Council to speak with one voice and to act to persuade Israel to cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, and to act to end the rampant settler terror and violence against the Palestinian people and their properties. Regrettably, the Council has failed to find the political will to act, and the illegal Israeli settlement campaign, including constant provocations and settler rampages, continue throughout the occupied Palestinian territory unabated and unpunished.

I wish to recall to the Council some of Israel's illegal settlement activities in the recent period, reflecting the occupying Power's ill intentions to continue rather than end its belligerent military occupation of our land. First is the construction of 1,121 units in the illegal settlement of Har Homa, in Jabal Abu Ghneim in the southern part of occupied East Jerusalem, about which the Council met 15 years ago but tragically failed to stop. There are also the construction of 180 units in the illegal settlement of Giv'at Ze'ev, 117 units in the Ariel settlement, 92 units in the Ma'ale Adumim settlement, 144 units in the Adam settlement and 180 units in the settlement of East Talpiot, also known as Armon Hanatsiv. All of those illegal settlements are also in or near occupied East Jerusalem. Moreover, there is the construction of 2,500 more units in Gilo, a massive settlement on the outskirts of occupied East Jerusalem near the city of Bethlehem, as well as the construction of 114 units in the Efrat settlement, also near Bethlehem. Add to that the construction of a 300-unit settlement in a declared military compound near the settlement of Beit El, adjacent to the city of Ramallah. An announcement has also been made of plans for the construction of another 84 units in the Kiryat Arba settlement, located in Al-Khalil, where hundreds of extremist Israeli settlers have been deliberately transferred into the midst of 200,000 Palestinians, who are daily subjected to terror, violence

and intimidation. In addition, during the same time frame, Israeli occupying forces raided the Al-Makhrour area of Beit Jala, a predominately Christian community west of Bethlehem, and carried out the demolition by bulldozer of two Palestinian homes and a water well, a road and 53 utility poles, cutting off electricity to at least 12 Palestinian families in the area, to facilitate the expansion of the illegal settlement of Har Gilo, entrench Israel's network of settlements from occupied East Jerusalem towards Al-Khalil in the south and further restrict the area for the future natural development of Palestinian cities, towns and villages.

To be clear, all settlements and settlement-related infrastructure, including the separation wall, are illegal, no matter where they are constructed in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem. Colonization of occupied territory through the transfer of citizens of the occupying Power is strictly prohibited by Article 49, Section 6, of the Fourth Geneva Convention, is considered to be a grave breach under Additional Protocol 1 to the Geneva Conventions and constitutes a war crime under Article 8, Section 2 (a) (iv) and (b) (viii), of the Rome Statute. Moreover, the illegality of that practice and the demands for its complete cessation and reversal have been repeatedly reaffirmed by the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the Economic and Social Council, as well as by the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion of 9 July 2004.

We continue to call on the international community to be firm in its condemnation and rejection of all of Israel's illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and to put a stop to them, regardless of the unjustifiable pretexts and justifications given by the Government of Israel. In this call we are also referring to attempts by the occupying Power to try to legalize its illegal acts, as it has tried to do with the Levy committee report, a right-wing, Israeli Government-appointed committee that has made erroneous conclusions and recommendations to the effect that Israel should legalize outposts — a recommendation that defies international law and the international consensus on Israel's illegal settlement campaign. Not coincidentally, the so-called Levy report was published on the anniversary of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004 (A/ES-19/273), which determined, inter alia, that, as an occupying Power, Israel is bound by the Hague Regulations, the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child — which are all applicable in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The Court also reaffirmed that, in view of the provisions of Article 49, paragraph 6, of the Fourth Geneva Convention, "the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory (including East Jerusalem) have been established in breach of international law".

How can Israel speak of a two-State solution — or peace for that matter — while it continues its illegal policies and practices, stealing more Palestinian land, scarce water resources and agricultural land, and destroying homes, civilian infrastructure and historical and religious landmarks, as well as separating Palestinian communities and even families through the construction of its settlements, the separation wall and its vast system of roads meant only for Jewish settlers, in addition to the multitude of other violations of international law and human rights it commits on a daily basis? How can Israel or the international community ask the Palestinian side to engage in negotiations on ending the occupation in order for them to finally gain their independence in their own State when the occupier continues to defy all agreements and provisions of international law and United Nations resolutions and to take more and more land, totally impairing the viability of the Palestinian State? Here, we must recall that, for 20 years throughout the height of the peace process, Israel persisted with the colonization of Palestinian land and with the entrenchment of its occupation. Indeed, despite the good faith and intentions of the Palestinian side, the Israeli side continued its deceitful behaviour, taking advantage of a flawed negotiation process and of the total asymmetry of the situation on the ground, where the occupying Power subjugated the occupied territory to its might and will in every respect.

In fact, from 1993 to 2000, the number of settlers in the occupied Palestinian territory doubled. Today there are more than 500,000 illegal settlers in about 150 illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in addition to some 100 outposts erected with the tacit approval of the Israeli Government.

The only conclusion one can come to is that, as long as Israel is allowed to act with impunity and in violation of international law without repercussions, little will change, and the possibility of achieving a

two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders will not be possible.

As President Mahmoud Abbas stated recently at the World Economic Forum on the Middle East, North Africa and Eurasia 2012, held in Istanbul in June: "Our region needs bridges of cooperation, peace and dialogue rather than walls and settlement expansion". He cautioned that time was running out for the historic peaceful compromise we seek. President Abbas has also repeatedly said that negotiations remain his first, second and third option for arriving at a peaceful settlement. But there must be genuine and credible negotiations based on the pre-1967 borders, with minor adjustments accepted by both sides, and based on adherence to, and respect for, international law, United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions, and in line with Israel's obligations under the Quartet road map. That is not a Palestinian condition, nor, for that matter, is it a Palestinian position; rather, it is the position of the entire international community.

Settlements run counter to the formula of land for peace, on which the entire Middle East peace process is built. Israel's illegal actions continue to undermine all efforts to resume the peace process, including via direct negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, on the basis of the well-known parameters. No Palestinian can accept continued settlement construction and the ongoing colonization of Palestinian land, whether in occupied East Jerusalem or in any other part of the occupied Palestinian territory. The international community, which has clear obligations under the Charter, United Nations resolutions, and international conventions and covenants, including its obligations as high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, must live up to those obligations and muster the political will to compel Israel to abandon its expansionism, colonization and aggression against the Palestinian people and their land, and instead pursue peace and take the hand of peace that has for so long been extended to it by the Palestinian leadership.

Tragically, 5 June marked 45 years since the onset of the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian and Arab lands in 1967 — 45 years of suffering and oppression in addition to the two prior decades of grave injustice inflicted on the Palestinian people. Our people have waited long enough for their inalienable rights to be realized and to live their lives free from occupation and in their own State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The time is now, and the international community should spare no effort to achieve the vision of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security, which would represent a historic achievement for our peoples, our region and the global community, and not just a tragically missed historic opportunity with far-reaching and ever more tragic consequences.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Waxman (Israel): Allow me to express Israel's appreciation to you, Mr. President, for your able stewardship of the Security Council this month.

It has been 18 years since a bomb ripped through the Argentine Jewish Community Centre in Buenos Aires, killing 85 people and injuring hundreds of others. The Islamic Republic of Iran — a State Member of the Organization — was responsible for that act, along with its proxy, Hizbullah. Last week, a suicide bomber exploded his bomb on a bus carrying Israeli tourists in Burgas, Bulgaria. Six were killed, including a pregnant woman. More than 30 were injured. The victims were mostly young people on vacation. Again, Iran and Hizbullah were responsible.

In recent months, Israelis were targeted in terrorist attacks and attempted attacks in India, Azerbaijan, Thailand, Kenya, Turkey and, most recently, in Cyprus. Iran and Hizbullah were responsible for each and every one of those acts. That is just one part of a bigger picture. Iran and Hizbullah's most recent terrorist plots span five continents and at least 24 countries.

It should be clear to everyone in the Chamber that those horrific events are not isolated. A clear line of terror runs from the bombing in Argentina to the attack in Bulgaria. It begins and ends in Iran.

The Iranian campaign of terrorism is a plague that threatens not only Israelis and Jews, but innocent people all over the globe. The time has come for the world to put an end to that campaign of terror, once and for all.

One must not underestimate the significance of the present moment. The Middle East is perhaps at its most important crossroads since the end of First World War. There are two main roads that the region can take. One is the road of fundamentalism. Today, the Iranian regime is trying to move the region down that road. Its ideology does not empower people to build a brighter future, but enslaves them in a medieval past. Instead

of opening minds with honest discourse, it clouds them with conspiracy and hate.

Last month, Iran's Vice-President, Mohammad-Reza Rahimi spoke in the presence of United Nations officials at an event in Tehran. He said that the teachings of the Talmud, one of the holiest books in Judaism, were responsible for "inciting the global drug trade and addiction in a bid to annihilate non-Jewish communities". He added that "gynaecologists around the world kill 'black babies' on the orders of the Zionists". Those statements were yet another example of the vile anti-Semitism that is part of the core ideology of the Iranian leadership.

But Iran's leaders do not just spread their hate with words; they advance it with actions. Hizbullah and Iran are an integral part of Al-Assad's killing machine.

Just a few days ago, Hizbullah's leader gave a speech praising the Al-Assad regime, calling it "a real military partner". Hizbullah and Iran provide Al-Assad with weapons, ammunition, training, intelligence, logistical equipment and more. They offer their unique expertise in the business of terrorism, monitoring people on the Internet and bypassing international sanctions. Iran and Hizbullah, Al-Assad's allies in this trio of brutality, will cross any line to keep the Al-Assad regime in power and to make sure that the Syrian people's quest for freedom is suppressed. And as we watch these events unfold, Iran continues to advance its military nuclear programme. The international community should ask itself a very simple question: If this is the way Iran behaves without nuclear weapons, how will it behave when it possesses the most dangerous weapon of all?

Israel continues to monitor the events in Syria closely. We are horrified by the humanitarian disaster taking place, and greatly concerned about the wider implications for regional stability and security. Last week, Syrian soldiers crossed into the area of separation set up according to the separation-of-forces agreement between Israel and Syria, in blatant violation of that agreement. This week, Syrian officials acknowledged the existence of their stockpiles of chemical weapons and stated clearly that they are ready to use them. That vast stockpile of chemical weapons is a potential disaster. The international community cannot stand idle. Al-Assad must know that he will be held accountable for using these weapons, and he must understand that transferring chemical weapons to Hizbullah or other terrorist organizations is a red line that he cannot cross.

Iran represents one road — a road of hatred — but there is another road that the Middle East can take, a road of peace, progress and prosperity. Moving down that road will require the region to push back against the fundamentalists and deal with the fundamental problems facing our region. Yet in this debate and indeed across the United Nations, one hears very little about such fundamental issues. I am sure that today's debate will be no exception. I am sure we will hear the same old criticisms of Israeli policies, but very little about the core challenges facing our region.

The United Nations Development Programme has sponsored five Arab human development reports since 2002. The reports reveal the crippling deficits of freedom, educational opportunities and women's empowerment that have long afflicted the Arab world. I ask: Is Israel responsible for the fact that gays are hunted down and hanged in Iran; that bloggers in the West Bank are jailed by the Palestinian Authority; that artists in Lebanon are ruthlessly censored by their Government; or that women in Gaza are arrested and tortured for daring to leave the house without a headscarf? Are we responsible for the Christians and other minorities who are fleeing the Middle East these days in droves because Islamic extremists attack their communities? Is Israel responsible for the fact that 25 per cent of Arab young people are unemployed and that many others are desperate to find a decent job? Maybe it is time to stop using Israel in this debate to sweep such important issues under the carpet. It is certainly time to finally deal openly and honestly with the basic deficits that cripple the Middle East.

A lot is said during these debates about Gaza. Much of it is disingenuous. Some in this Chamber claim that the situation in Gaza is deteriorating; however, the International Monetary Fund reports a gross domestic product growth of 20 per cent per capita in Gaza for 2011. Some here speak of a so-called Israeli blockade, although there is not a single item of civilian goods that cannot enter Gaza today. Let me be clear. There is a crisis in Gaza, for Israelis and Palestinians alike, and it is called Hamas.

The crisis in Gaza is that Hamas attacks the crossings used to transfer humanitarian aid and then complains about shortages and delays. The crisis in Gaza is that global terrorists have found fertile ground from where they can operate and destabilize other parts of our region, including the Sinai peninsula. The crisis in Gaza is that Hamas uses Palestinian schools as

launching pads to fire rockets at Israeli schools, and uses Palestinian hospitals to fire rockets at Israeli hospitals. More than 200 rockets have been fired into southern Israel in the past two months alone. Just yesterday, a rocket was fired into the major city of Ashkelon.

Yet even as rockets fly out of Gaza, Israel continues to work with the international community to make sure that humanitarian aid, medicine and goods reach the inhabitants of Gaza. How many other Governments provide essential assistance to the very areas from which their citizens are being attacked?

As we stand at this critical crossroads, the leaders in our region should look in the mirror and finally take the road less travelled in the Middle East — the road of tolerance, compromise and moderation; the road that condemns terrorism and promotes understanding of the other; the road of peace.

The Palestinian leadership should do the same. They can start by dropping their preconditions and rejoining Israel in direct negotiations that deal with all final status issues. They can take that road by ending incitement in their schools, mosques and media, and by naming their town squares after peacemakers, not suicide bombers. They can take that road by finally acknowledging that the Jewish people have a historic connection to the land of Israel.

The Government of Israel is prepared to work hard to achieve lasting peace with the Palestinians through direct negotiations. The people of Israel are prepared to make painful compromises to reach that noble goal. Yet, as we wait for them to return to the negotiating table, the Palestinians continue to take unilateral steps that will not bring us one inch closer to peace.

The moment is critical. It is time for the leaders of the Middle East to make the right choices. The people of our region have already sacrificed so much. They deserve nothing less.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his briefing.

Last week the world witnessed, and the Security Council appropriately condemned, a heinous terrorist attack in Bulgaria. The target was innocent Israeli tourists on vacation on the Black Sea. Five Israelis and one Bulgarian were murdered, and scores more were injured, including citizens of Bulgaria, Italy, Slovakia and the United States. There is no justification whatsoever for such attacks on innocent people. We extend our heartfelt condolences to the victims and their families, and to the people of Israel, Bulgaria and all those countries whose citizens were harmed in that awful event.

Turning to Syria, the Council has failed to respond credibly to the Al-Assad regime's onslaught because of vetoes by two of its members, the most recent occurring last week. As Ambassador Rice said after last Thursday's vote, "The Security Council has failed utterly in its most important task on its agenda this year". It is our hope, as she also said then, that the day will come when the Council can assume its proper role at the centre of the international response to the conflict in Syria.

We continue to see a grave escalation of the regime's attacks against its own people that continues to spread instability well beyond Syria's borders. As we saw with incidents over the weekend, the regime is losing its grip over increasingly large swathes of the country. The Syrian opposition now controls several crossings on the Iraqi and Turkish borders. That is increasing evidence that the Al-Assad regime will not remain in power, and since the Council has failed to shoulder its responsibilities, the United States will continue to work with the friends of the Syrian people to increase pressure on the regime, support the Syrian opposition, marshal relief for the Syrian people and help prepare for a Syrian-led democratic transition.

We are deeply concerned about the incident on 18 and 19 July in the area of operations of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), as described in a letter from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to the Council last week, in which nearly 500 armed soldiers from the Syrian Arab armed forces entered the area of separation. Over the past six months, Syria has committed multiple violations of the key provisions of the 1974 agreement that led to the establishment of UNDOF, but the July incident constitutes the gravest breach of the agreement in its nearly 40-year history. We strongly condemn all violations of that disengagement agreement. Such violations must cease immediately.

The ongoing violence in Syria continues to put pressure on all its neighbours to support dramatic

increases in the number of refugees. We thank those countries for providing the refugees with safe harbour. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that, on 18 and 19 July alone, 18,000 Syrians fled across the border into Lebanon, meaning that the estimated number of refugees in Lebanon increased by nearly 60 per cent in just two days. More than 117,000 Syrian refugees have registered with UNHCR in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey. It has become a humanitarian crisis. The United States has provided $64 million during the current fiscal year to address the needs of those displaced by violence, and we urge other donors to provide support.

Let me also reiterate what President Obama said on Monday about one of the most worrisome aspects of the Syrian crisis. The regime has now acknowledged stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons. President Al-Assad and those around him have been duly warned that the world is watching and that they will be held accountable should the regime make the egregious mistake of using such weapons.

Lebanon has been particularly hard hit by Al-Assad's aggression. The Syrian military forces have repeatedly shelled Lebanese territory, resulting in civilian deaths in several locations. We condemn those acts and demand that the Syrian regime cease such egregious violations of Lebanon's sovereignty. As reiterated in the Council's 9 July press statement, the international community is unified in its demand that Lebanon's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and the authority of the Lebanese State be respected, in accordance with Security Council resolutions.

Despite those destabilizing external dynamics, Lebanese President Sleiman continues to press ahead with national dialogue talks — an initiative that we welcome. We support the efforts of Lebanese political leaders to remain focused on maintaining calm, including safeguarding Lebanon from the effects of the crisis in neighbouring Syria. In addition, we welcome Prime Minister Mikati's 11 June announcement that the Government of Lebanon had fulfilled its 2012 funding obligation to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

I will now turn to our shared goals related to a comprehensive Middle East peace. During Secretary of State Clinton's recent trip, she met separately with President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu and reinforced the message that the United States supports the parties' continued engagement based on the leaders' exchange of letters earlier this year. She underscored our view that the status quo is unsustainable. She reiterated that our goal remains an independent Palestinian State, living in peace and security alongside the Jewish democratic State of Israel.

During the visit, Secretary Clinton stated publicly that "it is only through negotiation, not through international venues or unilateral acts, that peace can be and will be secured". We believe that unilateral actions harm the peace process and only entrench both sides. The use of international forums to force decisions on final status issues that must be resolved directly by the parties does nothing to tangibly improve the daily lives of Palestinians, nor to foster the trust between the parties needed to make progress towards a two-State solution. It is incumbent upon both parties to discontinue unilateral actions that jeopardize efforts to achieve peace.

The United States reiterates that it does not accept the legitimacy of continued settlement activity and opposes any effort to legalize settlement outposts. As we work to put the parties back on the path of direct negotiations, we must also address the realities on the ground. The international community, along with the Palestinian people, has invested a great deal in the Palestinian Authority's institution-building efforts.

Sustaining that effort is now in jeopardy as the Palestinian Authority faces its worst financial crisis ever. Israel, the donor community and the Palestinian leadership are all taking steps to address the crisis, but the financial gap remains large and the consequences of failing to close that gap are severe. More needs to be done now to avoid a collapse of the institutions so vital to providing for the daily needs, governance and security of the residents of the West Bank.

We should all also focus our support on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), particularly in this time of financial crisis for that Agency. UNRWA provides essential services to the Palestinian refugee population in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan and — it is important to remember — Syria. UNRWA provides education for more than 485,000 schoolchildren, primary health care in 138 clinics and social services for the most vulnerable Palestinian refugees, particularly in Lebanon and Gaza.

Before concluding, let me reiterate that any further rocket fire on southern Israel from Gaza is simply

unacceptable. We remind members of the paralysing effects that such attacks have on the lives of innocent Israelis and the threat that they pose to the peace process and to the region generally. The international community must stand united in opposition to such threats.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for the very comprehensive information that he has given us. We also thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Deputy Permanent Representative of Israel for their presentations.

As is our custom, every month we meet to consider the issue of the Middle East and we frequently find ourselves obliged to repeat our arguments. However, during the past month, we have been faced with very unusual situations, whose future impact is still uncertain. Only last week, we had several significant events.

First, we did not reach agreement on providing unanimous political support to Mr. Kofi Annan and, therefore, adopted a 30-day extension of the United Nations Supervision Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic, supposedly for its orderly withdrawal. Secondly, in Lebanon, the national dialogue was resumed under the threat of a spillover of violence from Syria. Thirdly, in Yemen, the authorities continue to wage war against terrorist groups that threaten the nascent democracy. Fourthly, only a few days ago, more than 100 persons were reported dead in Iraq, reminding us that the country remains on our agenda, as the recently adopted extension of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq underscores. Fifthly, there was a terrorist attack against Israeli tourists in Bulgaria — an act that we condemn.

The situation in Syria is of particular concern given the information that reaches us daily on the human and material losses and the high number of displaced persons. The lack of consensus on a draft resolution by the Council is doubly unfortunate against that humanitarian background. On this occasion, we will also mention one key issue that has been on the Security Council's agenda for the longest time and that took up most of Mr. Serry's briefing, namely, the Palestinian issue. That issue has been somewhat overtaken by events in other countries of the region.

In that regard, and as for the peace process in the Middle East, we continue to believe that the creation of a Palestinian State, living in peace and security within secure borders with its neighbour, Israel, is an objective of singular importance. The so-called two-State solution favoured by the Quartet must be the product of direct negotiations between the parties involved, with the support of the international community.

We believe that the daily efforts to find a definitive peaceful solution must continue. However, they should be complemented by the will and commitment of the parties to negotiating in an atmosphere of good faith and mutual trust. Both sides should do their utmost to find common ground that will lead them to finding a satisfactory solution as soon as possible.

We note that the situation is extremely fragile, but that does not mean that it is impossible to resolve. The efforts of the Quartet and its individual members, as well as the direct approaches that have taken place between the parties themselves, suggest that all is not lost. We are willing to support and promote every opportunity to resume negotiations, but we remained concerned over actions that clearly threaten the prospect of a peaceful solution.

As stated by the International Court of Justice, the settlement policy promoted by the Government of Israel is illegal and jeopardizes the outcome of the peace process. In that regard, we are concerned that the Israeli Government, on the one hand, should seek to justify such illegal actions by publishing the report of a presidential commission appointed to study the situation of the settlements in occupied territories, while on the other hand it denies access to United Nations officials appointed by the Human Rights Council to analyse the legal status of these settlements. It is even more disturbing to note that, according to Israeli authorities, the work of such a mission would be "biased and flawed" and that the fact-finding mission

> "embodies the inherent distortion that typifies the United Nations Human Rights Council's treatment of Israel and the hijacking of the important human rights agenda by non-democratic countries".

We have serious doubts about the characterization of the work of one of the most important bodies for the protection of human rights as "biased and inaccurate".

Additionally, we believe it necessary to review the need to continue the blockade imposed by Israel on the

Gaza Strip. We are concerned that some 80 per cent of families in Gaza depend on humanitarian aid. While recognizing Israel's security concerns, this collective punishment has been imposed on all innocent families living in the area. At the same time, we consider it important that all armed groups operating from Gaza cease their military claims. Their actions only prolong the suffering of these families and jeopardize the peace process.

Finally, my delegation believes that respect for international law is the key to the peace process in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. That respect depends not only on Israel and Palestine, but, in the face of their continued violation of these norms, on the international community and the United Nations as well. Only by respecting the rights of each of these populations, and by pledging to seek a peaceful solution, will they be able to live together with strong and secure borders.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

I would also like to extend the sincere condolences of France to the victims of the terrorist attack in Bulgaria. I reiterate my country's full solidarity to the Israeli State and people in their fight against hatred and terrorism.

The Syrian regime has systematically violated resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012) by intensifying its use of heavy weaponry against its own people and by bombing urban centres from airplanes today, for the first time. According to non-governmental organizations, an estimated 19,000 Syrians have been killed by the regime, while 3 million have been endangered by internal displacements. By United Nations estimates, another 1 million face food insecurity. The escalation of violence has caused tens of thousands of refugees to flee to neighbouring countries. We commend the assistance given to the people fleeing Syria.

The impact of all this on regional stability is of increasing concern. In the Golan Heights, the Syrian authorities committed a serious violation of the 1974 agreement by penetrating into the separation zone. We will not allow Syria to dissimulate its excesses by fomenting regional unrest. The threatened use of chemical and biological weapons and the violations of Lebanese sovereignty and of resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006) are equally unacceptable.

That is the message sent by the Security Council last week, reiterating week its commitment to the stability, sovereignty and integrity of Lebanon, threatened by the growing number of Syrian incursions and bombardments on the Lebanese side of the border. We welcome the responsible attitude of the Lebanese authorities, politicians and people, who have demonstrated their resolve not to be dragged into a conflict that is not theirs. We encourage them to continue to invest in the national dialogue relaunched by Lebanese President Sleiman.

The impotence to which the Council has been reduced by the Russian and Chinese vetoes does not leave it without recourse. We will maintain our support for the Syrian people and a democratic transition. We have adopted a new series of sanctions against Syria in the context of the European Union. We will pursue our work to support the opposition, including on the ground, and to help them to coalesce around a political project and a transitional Government for Syria. We will also continue to build a case against the Syrian regime to establish its criminal responsibility for the crimes against humanity of which it is guilty. We will continue to respond to the appeals of peoples in danger and to pursue our resolute efforts, including within the European Union, for increased humanitarian aid to the Syrian people.

The threats to regional stability are not without consequences for the peace process in the Middle East. Our responsibility today in this difficult context is to maintain the viability and political credibility of the two-State solution. And yet, every day Israel's pursuit of its settlement policy undermines the possibility of peace and violates international law and the resolutions of the Security Council. Expulsions continue in Area C. The violence of certain settlers too often goes unpunished. The recent report of the Levy Commission adds insult to injury by claiming legitimacy and legality for a fait accompli. We call on Israel to reject it and to put an immediate end to its gross violations of international law.

For our part, we will continue to affirm that settlement activity in all its forms is counter to international law and impedes peace. We deplore the inability of the Council and the Quartet to express themselves on this issue. Today, alongside our European

partners, we are considering specific ways to respond to this policy, which has become the main threat to the two-State solution.

The viability of that solution requires the viability of the partners implementing it. We therefore reaffirm our support for the weakened Palestinian Authority. The financial crisis besetting the Authority is unprecedented. We call once again on donors to remobilize support for the construction of a Palestinian State courageously and successfully launched by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad under the authority of President Abbas.

It is important in parallel to make headway on confidence-building measures that would allow dialogue to resume. We are encouraged by the pursuit of contacts between the two parties, but their discussions must lead to significant gestures on such issues as the pre-Oslo prisoners and weapons for the Palestinian police.

We support President Abbas in his pursuit of Palestinian reconciliation pursuant to the principles of the peace process endorsed by the Palestine Liberation Organization. No peace will be possible without Palestinian unity, and in that regard we deplore the fact that Hamas has interrupted the work of the Electoral Commission in Gaza. If new socio-economic and political prospects are to emerge in Gaza, Israel must change its policy and move towards a complete lifting of the blockade, pursuant to resolution 1860 (2009). Moreover, Israel's security must be taken into account, and we firmly condemn the rockets being launched against southern Israel from the Gaza Strip and Sinai.

Such confidence-building measures are no substitute for a credible negotiating process. France has frequently reaffirmed, here and in the General Assembly, the need to identify a framework for the negotiations. Above and beyond the required leadership, negotiations cannot be credibly resumed without clear parameters, a realistic timetable, and guarantees against non-respect for the decisions of the international community. We hope that the interested parties as a whole, including within the Council, can contribute to the development of such a framework. If such reflection is not begun as soon as possible, we must fear that the two-State solution is no more than a pious wish and that peace is beyond our reach.

Mr. Musayev (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to express our thanks to the Colombian presidency for convening this very important open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, for his briefing.

It has now become conventional for any consideration of political dynamics in the Middle East region to focus on the wave of changes that the region has encountered in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Never before has the region experienced such a large-scale transformation driven from within. In the shortest time, the region has been caught in the limelight of the international security agenda and generated intense discussion over the causes of these transformational processes, the courses of action and strategies to be adopted by the international community, and the future that these events presage for the entire region.

Our discussion today should undoubtedly be yet another attempt to recollect, analyse and think through the vital changes that Middle Eastern societies have been exposed to and are still grappling with. The peoples of the Middle East should be congratulated on their determination and firmness towards achieving greater freedom and wider political participation. At the same time, many outstanding issues are pending, and we have come to realize that there are no easy fixes or magic solutions. While the prospects are promising, the challenges of transition may look arduous and, to some extent, intimidating. Against this background, the international community should do its utmost and direct its collective efforts towards helping the countries of the region and make their transition successful, sustainable and durable.

Having shed some light on the challenges of the outstanding new transformational processes in the Middle East, one cannot help but ponder the lasting traditional security challenges, more specifically armed conflicts, that are rife in the region. It is obvious that their solution is imperative to achieving durable peace, stability and security in the region, and that respect for international law should be an absolute priority to this effect. At the same time, political consistency represents one of the major prerequisites if legitimate demands are to be transformed into desirable outcome. It is clear that, while seeking justice, one cannot simultaneously advocate or encourage injustices in respect of others.

At a more specific level, we would like once again to express our profound concern over the situation with regard to the Middle East peace process, which has been at a standstill with no substantive progress towards resuming direct talks between the parties.

Against this background, the construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, the confiscation of Palestinian lands, the displacement of the civilian population, action characterized as collective punishment of civilians, and attempts to legitimize illegal activities are particularly alarming. Such measures represent open disregard for international law and contempt for human rights, place a tremendous burden on civilians, cause serious obstruction to the peace process and, more dangerously, threaten the two-State solution and the emergence of a viable Palestinian State.

It is clear that there is no alternative to peace and negotiations. However, the lack of agreement on political issues in situations of armed conflict and military occupation cannot be used as a pretext for disrespecting international humanitarian and human rights law. We proceed from the importance of reaffirming, with respect to the occupied Palestinian territories and similar situations in other parts of the world, the continuing applicability of all relevant international legal norms, achieving the invalidation of activities aimed at the consolidation of military occupations, initiating urgent measures towards removing the adverse effects of such activities, and discouraging any further practices of the same or a similar nature. Illegal activities in the occupied territories cannot be recognized under any circumstances.

In assuming its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council must react adequately in order to put an end to illegal practices and policies and ensure that international law, human rights and fundamental freedoms are observed and respected. We support the ongoing efforts to achieve the Palestinian reconciliation, and express our hope that Palestinian unity will soon be restored in the interest of the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people.

The people of Palestine has been recognized as having the right to self-determination and statehood. That has been noted in a number of United Nations resolutions and by the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion on the *Legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory*. Azerbaijan supports the application of Palestine for admission to membership in the United Nations and looks forward to a solution on this issue based on international law.

To sum up, let me express the hope that, with the best efforts of the nations of the Middle East and the international community, positive achievements and momentum will be sustained, while the pending issues related to security and democratic transition are resolutely addressed by adopting swift policies and approaches in view of changing realities in the region.

Mr. Wang Min (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, for his briefing. I have also listened carefully to the statements made by the representatives of Palestine and Israel.

The Palestine and Israel question is at the heart of the Middle East process and has a major impact on the situation in the Middle East region. The Palestinian-Israeli peace talks have long been at a standstill, which is a source of great concern for China. Dialogue and negotiation are the only way to achieve a settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli issue. China has always maintained that both sides should, on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map for peace in the Middle East, resolve their differences through dialogue and negotiation and achieve the ultimate goal of establishing an independent Palestinian State and having two States living side by side in peace and security.

We welcome and support every initiative conducive to breaking the deadlock in the Palestinian-Israeli talks and pushing for a resumption of the talks between the two sides. We hope that the two parties will continuously build up mutual trust and create conditions for a resumption of engagement and an early relaunching of peace talks. The international community should further intensify efforts to promote such talks. China hopes that the Quartet will play a greater role in pressing for a resumption of the peace talks. China supports a greater contribution by the Security Council in advancing the Middle East peace process.

As always, China opposes the Israeli practice of building Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as attempts to unilaterally change the status quo of Jerusalem. We call on Israel to release Palestinian prisoners and detainees and to improve the living and medical conditions of Palestinians still

in prisons or in detention. We urge Israel to halt any actions that may lead to tension and to take measures to remove the barriers impeding the resumption of peace talks.

At this stage, the security and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Gaza, remains grim. The relevant United Nations resolutions must be effectively implemented. We hope that Israel will expeditiously and comprehensively lift its blockade against Gaza and allow access to medical aid, assistance and all the materiel needed for reconstruction, so as to alleviate the humanitarian situation.

As always, China firmly supports the Palestinian people's just cause for the restoration of their legitimate national rights. We support the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We also support granting United Nations membership to Palestine.

China is prepared to work with the rest of the international community and will continue to play a constructive role in ensuring the early achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Last week, a draft resolution on Syria failed to be adopted (see S/PV.6810). That was because there were major drawbacks in the draft resolution, which violated the basic principles governing international relations. Ambassador Li Baodong gave a detailed account of China's position on that occasion, so I shall not repeat it. I wish to emphasize that China has always maintained that the destiny of Syria must be decided by the Syrian people themselves. The Syrian question can only be resolved through political means. The imperative for the international community is to fully support and coordinate with Mr. Annan in his mediation efforts; support the implementation of the communiqué adopted at the Geneva meeting of the Action Group, the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and Mr. Annan's six-point plan; push for an immediate ceasefire and cessation of violence by all sides in Syria; and create conditions for the early launch of an inclusive political dialogue.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): No one here doubts that the transformative processes that have engulfed the Middle East are serious and long-term in nature. Their impact is often difficult to predict and will continue for a long time to come. Russia, which has unswervingly supported the yearning of the peoples of the region for a better life, consistently champions non-violent and evolutionary forms of change — which should not be achieved at the cost of loss of life and destruction.

Any internal political differences must be resolved peaceably by the peoples concerned themselves, through national dialogue and without outside interference, especially interference involving force. That principled approach was reaffirmed by Russian President Vladimir V. Putin during his recent visits and talks with the leaders of Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority.

At the same time, as we have underscored repeatedly, the events of the Arab Spring cannot be used as a pretext to postpone resolving issues related to an Arab-Israeli settlement. Quite to the contrary, progress towards a comprehensive, fair and robust peace between Israelis and Palestinians on the basis of the well-known international legal platform would promote the overall normalization of the situation in the region.

Unfortunately, the situation with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian track continues to stagnate. The status quo is, quite obviously, fragile, and it is periodically interrupted by flare-ups of confrontation, which further jeopardizes the prospects for achieving a just settlement on the basis of the two-State solution. We must also point out the stalemate with regard to implementing the programme of action for a final settlement before the end of 2012, pursuant to the now almost year-old statement of the Quartet issued in New York (see SG/2178).

In spite of the efforts of the Quartet and other interested parties, including Jordan, we have thus far not succeeded in relaunching the negotiating process. However, that is not a reason to give up. We will continue to work within the framework of the Quartet and bilateral channels to restore positive momentum to the process.

Steps to promote an atmosphere of trust between Ramallah and Tel Aviv could help to break the deadlock. For Israel that could include, for example, releasing Palestinian detainees held in Israeli jails since before the Oslo Agreement and allowing the transfer to the Palestinian Authority of goods, including those of Russian manufacture stored in Jordan. In that connection, we welcome the decision by Israeli

authorities to transfer tax and customs revenues to the Palestinians. That step, just as the financial assistance provided by Saudi Arabia, should have a positive impact on the socio-economic situation in the Palestinian territories.

The ongoing Israeli settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem, is impeding the establishment of a conducive climate and destroying the prospects for a two-State solution. That policy of creating a fait accompli blatantly violates the requirements of the road map and aims to prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations. Such activity is illegal and must end immediately.

It is regrettable that the veto by the United States of America on a draft resolution on settlements (see S/PV.6484) prevented the Council from expressing itself on such an important political and humanitarian issue. We are seriously concerned about the deterioration in the grave humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, which is fuelling radical activity.

Restoring Palestinian national unity on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization platform and the Arab Peace Initiative is an important element in the success of a future settlement. Without that, a full-fledged negotiating process and the practical implementation of agreements cannot be considered. The logical conclusion of that process should be the reunification of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under legitimate Palestinian authorities. In that regard, we welcome the efforts of Egypt's new leadership, headed by President Morsy.

For many months now, the members of the Security Council have had on the table before them an application by the Palestinians for admission to the United Nations as a full-fledged Member State. We back the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people for self-determination and see no incompatibility between the implementation of those rights and the pressing need to resume negotiations. The vulgar forms of pressure that the Palestinian people are subjected to in their desire to fulfil those legitimate aspirations should be condemned.

The unanimous adoption by the Security Council on 20 July of resolution 2059 (2012) on extending the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria served as an important indication of the need for both sides, including the opposition, to cease violence. The Council's unanimity demonstrates its ability to achieve consensus. We are referring, in that regard, to tried, tested and balanced political decisions. In backing the work of the Mission, Russia has recently informed the Secretariat of its readiness to contribute 30 military observers to it.

The position of the Russian Federation is consistent in nature and is based on principle. We advocate the rapid peaceful settlement of the crisis by the Syrians themselves, without foreign interference, through national dialogue between the Government and the opposition, during which they could freely, democratically and without any preconditions determine the future order of the country. That position is fully in keeping with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex), which laid the foundation for the activity of Kofi Annan's Action Group for Syria. Against the backdrop of an unfolding spiral of violence, intense pressure on both Damascus and all of the opposition groups and strict compliance with Kofi Annan's plan and the Geneva agreements are needed. The situation is dangerous because the opposition, a significant part of which does not wish to even hear of dialogue, is being told to continue with the armed struggle, which only exacerbates the confrontations and destabilization.

The United States of America has recently spoken of its intention to circumvent the Security Council. In essence, that is nothing new as such a policy has been followed by Washington and a number of other capitals since the beginning of the crisis in Syria, which has significantly exacerbated it. It is therefore those Member States that should bear the burden of responsibility for the likely catastrophic consequences of those actions.

The Russian Federation intends to continue to work towards a consensus in order to reach an internal Syrian dialogue. We are ready to afford both the opposition and the Government a negotiation platform in Moscow to forge contacts to unify the opposition and for possible negotiations between representatives of the Government and the opposition.

In conclusion, a lot of attention has been paid to the recent statement by the representative of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Syria with regard to the possible use of chemical weapons in case of foreign aggression. We assume that the authorities of the country will continue to abide unswervingly by the international commitments they subscribed to in 1968 when they acceded to the 1925 Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition

of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare.

Mr. Moraes Cabral (Portugal): I thank Robert Serry for his very comprehensive and useful briefing, as well as the representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

Portugal naturally aligns itself with the statement that will be delivered later by the observer of the European Union.

The situation in the Middle East remains of the highest concern. A traditionally volatile region is again facing increasingly grave risks as the bloody conflict in Syria rages and the Middle East peace process remains in a protracted impasse, stubbornly oblivious to the changes and shifting dynamics underway. Violence and terrorism continue to maim and claim innocent lives. Portugal condemns in the strongest terms the terrorist attack in Bulgaria, on 18 July, which caused the death of a Bulgarian and several Israeli citizens and gravely injured many others. We present our sincere condolences to the families of the victims. Likewise, we condemn the ongoing firing of rockets into Israel from Gaza against innocent civilians. All acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation wherever, whenever and by whomever they are committed.

Last Thursday I expressed in this Chamber my country's views on the deteriorating situation in Syria (see S/PV.6810), so today I will refer to it only briefly.

Eighteen months into that deadly conflict, the country continues to slip into civil war, destabilizing neighbouring countries and threatening the integrity of Syria itself with grave and unforeseeable risks for regional peace and security. Resolution 2059 (2012) allows the Syrian authorities a final chance to match deeds with words, reverse the situation and prevent the country's descent into absolute chaos. The Syrian Government must immediately cease the use of heavy weapons in populated centres. That is the first minimal step needed for the establishment of an environment conducive to a cessation of violence and a Syrian-led political transition.

We also call upon all parties to engage constructively with the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on Syria and to commit to a sustained cessation of all armed violence in all its forms, as well as to the implementation of the six-point plan and the political transition set forth by the Action Group for Syria in Geneva. Portugal highly values the role of the League of Arab States and its efforts in seeking a peaceful solution to the conflict, and we commend the assistance that neighbouring countries continue to provide those persons fleeing violence and persecution in Syria.

As has been repeatedly stated, developments in the Arab world render a final settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict ever more urgent. However, comprehensive and enduring regional peace will remain elusive as long as the Palestinian question, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, stays unresolved. Nevertheless, the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations continue to be at a dangerous standstill, and actions on the ground render the resumption of the dialogue between the parties increasingly difficult. Most troublesome, in that regard, is Israel's continued and intensified settlement activity; its ongoing policies in Area C and East Jerusalem of evictions, confiscations and demolitions of Palestinian housing and infrastructure; and its forced transfer of populations. Just a couple of days ago the Israeli Government requested the Israeli Supreme Court to allow the demolition of Palestinian hamlets in the South Hebron Hills to enable the area to be used for military training. All those acts are illegal under international law and must be clearly condemned as such. Moreover, they undermine any possibility of a two-State solution based on the internationally endorsed parameters as colonization erodes the territorial basis of any such solution. Soon there will be no land to exchange for peace. The political credibility of the whole process is at stake, and the disingenuous report of Justice Levy further undermines it.

Also, the human rights and humanitarian situation of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory is deplorable, as we heard from Mr. Serry and Ambassador Mansour. Settler violence and vandalism, including attacks on religious sites, excessive restrictions on movement, deliberate humiliations, arbitrary and administrative detentions without formal charge, and the use of disproportionate force by the Israeli security forces continue to take a heavy toll on Palestinian daily life.

In Gaza, the blockade, which is now entering its sixth year, has created an aid-dependant economy and reinforced extremism. Fundamental change of the situation in the Gaza Strip and lasting recovery will require the full implementation of resolution

1860 (2009). We urge Israel to cooperate full with the relevant humanitarian actors in the occupied Palestinian territory, namely, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and to ensure full and unimpeded humanitarian access, as is its obligation as an occupying Power.

The parties must undertake all efforts to engage in credible direct negotiations. They must take steps that foster mutual confidence. In that context, Portugal welcomes the second visit by families from the Gaza Strip to see relatives in Israeli detention, as we welcome the transfer by the Israeli Government to the Palestinian Authority of 180,000,000 shekels advance on tax revenue transfers. A reliable and predictable transfer of revenues is essential for the economic and fiscal sustainability of the Palestinian Authority. But Palestinian access and use of their resources in Area C are also key for the economic viability of the Palestinian Authority, without which it would be increasingly difficult to sustain and build upon the Palestinian State-building achievements carried out by Prime Minister Fayyad, under the direction of President Abbas, whose endeavours we commend and encourage.

The resumption of a meaningful negotiation process based on the well-known parameters and on the Quartet statement of 23 September 2011 remains an utmost priority. We all know that direct negotiations are the only way to settle all final status issues, but the window for a negotiated solution is closing quickly. Israelis and Palestinians — and all in the region — can only gain from the establishment of a sovereign, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State committed to peace and security and Israel's full integration into its regional environment on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative. The parties simply cannot afford to miss this historic opportunity.

Time is running out, as Mr. Serry said. Now is the moment for Israelis and Palestinians to re-engage seriously and courageously. It is the time to take the risks that a just and durable peace necessarily entails. It is not the time for yet more procrastination. It is an illusion for either party to think that time and the status quo are on their side. If there is one thing the past year and a half has shown us, it is that history will wait for no one. It will proceed at its own pace, and it will follow its own course.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri (India): I would like to begin by thanking Special Coordinator Robert Serry for his comprehensive briefing on the status of the Middle East peace process and the situation in the region. I would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their valuable statements.

The Middle East peace process has been stalemated for a long time. Informal talks over the past two years have not resulted so far in any substantive progress towards the resumption of direct talks. The efforts of the international community, including the Quartet, to create an environment conducive to meaningful negotiations have not yielded any positive results either. Recent efforts towards addressing basic differences over the parameters for the resumption of direct talks on final status issues — settlements, borders, security and resources — have also failed to make any progress. The focus of the international community on the unfolding events in the region appears to have overshadowed the Middle East peace process.

Under such circumstances, there is a growing risk of a sharp deterioration in the situation. Clearly, the status quo in the Palestinian question is untenable and unsustainable, particularly when the leading members of the international community claim to be supporting the democratic aspirations of other peoples in the region. Before it gets too late, the international community, particularly the Quartet, must redouble its efforts to bring the parties to the negotiating table. The parties should also remain engaged and take confidence-building measures that may help to resume dialogue. In that regard, the joint statement issued by Israel and the Palestinian Authority in May, committing the sides to peace and the release of Palestinian prisoners, is a welcome sign. The parties must implement their commitments under the joint statement fully and without further delay.

We think that the first step to be taken for the resumption of direct talks between the parties is the freezing of illegal settlement activities by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories. The continuing settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are threatening the basic premises of the two-State solution. Settlement activities have also exacerbated the humanitarian problems of the Palestinian people, with increasing violence and the aggravation of tension between the settlers and the Palestinian population. We therefore reiterate our call on Israel to stop all settlement activities.

The blockade of Gaza has entered its sixth year. The humanitarian situation continues to be grim, with disruption to essential services, economic activity and infrastructure. While Israeli security concerns are legitimate, there is a need to avoid all violence against civilians everywhere. The blockade of Gaza is causing severe hardships, amounting to collective punishment of the population. While Israel has taken some positive steps to relax the blockade by allowing essential commodities to enter Gaza, those steps fall short of what is required. Israel should immediately lift the blockade and allow for the resumption of normal socio-economic activities in Gaza so that the residents can rebuild their lives and their dependence on humanitarian assistance is reduced.

In line with their commitment to democratic values and principles, the progress made by the Palestinian factions on the reconciliation front is welcome. We hope that those efforts will bear fruit soon, leading to the formation a unity Government, the holding of elections, the reunification of Palestinian State institutions and measures for the reconstruction and development of Palestinian society.

Despite severe political and economic constraints, the progress made by the Palestinian Authority in institution-building is commendable. Various studies have indicated that Palestinian institutions have reached the threshold required for a functioning State. We expect the Organization to reaffirm that fact through a favourable decision on Palestine's application for membership. Meanwhile, the donor community should provide additional resources to address the severe financial difficulties that the Palestinian Authority is facing. Palestinian tax revenue must be transferred to the Palestinian Authority regularly and on time.

India has a long history of solidarity with the Palestinian people. India has extended its consistent and unwavering support to the Palestinian cause in word and deed. Let me reiterate that India continues to support the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to a State living side by side and in peace and security with Israel based on the pre-1967 borders, as enunciated in the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace endorsed by the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. India will also continue to provide material and technical assistance to the Palestinian people through budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority, various development projects undertaken under the India-Brazil-South Africa Facility for Hunger and Poverty Alleviation, bilateral training programmes for institutional capacity building and human resource development, and regular financial assistance to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

With respect to Syria, let me state that we do not see an alternative to the full implementation of resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012) for a political resolution of the crisis without further bloodshed. A right step in that direction will be for all sides to implement resolution 2059 (2012), adopted unanimously by the Council last week. It is necessary that all parties, inside and outside of Syria, fully cooperate with Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan.

In conclusion, the Palestinian question remains at the centre of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which includes other Arab lands under occupation. The Security Council should remain cognizant of the fact that the final and comprehensive settlement of all Arab-Israeli issues is paramount to an enduring and lasting peace in the region. Developments in the Middle East since early 2011 underscore the urgent need to expeditiously address those issues. India stands ready to play its role in our collective endeavours to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to start by thanking Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his very comprehensive briefing.

Everyone here knows that the situation in the Middle East and the Palestinian cause are marked by a freeze in negotiations and a deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. Also, there is a stalemate on the vision of a two-State solution, as a result of Israeli settlement activity. We simply do not know what the consequences will be for the security and stability of the Middle East as a whole. This year has witnessed further unprecedented expansion of settlements.

The Israeli occupation forces have mobilized their legal arsenal, their settlers and their armed forces to conquer more land following the expulsion of residents from their homes and after crops and trees that form their only source of income have been uprooted. The illegal settlement policy has been repeatedly affirmed, and the international community has repeatedly condemned the situation and Israel's expansionist policy. Even so, the Israeli authorities have pursued their policy of settlement, including in East Jerusalem.

The Security Council has been unable to reaffirm its position against such illegal settlements. The Palestinian people have, however, continued to negotiate or to express their readiness to resume negotiations, responding to them favourably and showing their good intentions and good will. About that there can be neither doubt nor question.

Unfortunately, that has not been the case with Israel, which has persisted in its expansionist settlement policies, bringing to naught the vision of a two-State solution. Its policy of gradually isolating the city of Jerusalem from its natural Palestinian surroundings, which has already been implemented in the region, clearly speaks to a premeditated plan to ensure that a two-State solution is too difficult or even impossible to achieve.

The city of East Jerusalem is experiencing troubling changes. Indeed, the rate at which settlements are being built and religious and holy sites desecrated is alarming. The Al-Quds Committee, chaired by our sovereign, categorically rejects the report of the Israeli legal advisor who claimed that the Al-Aqsa Mosque was an integral part of Israeli territory. The Kingdom of Morocco denounces, condemns and rejects his irresponsible and unacceptable position, which threatens the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque and runs counter to United Nations resolutions, which reject any changes to the occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The Kingdom of Morocco understands the real intention behind those statements, which are accompanied by repeated steps to Judaize the city of East Jerusalem that have changed the religious and cultural character of the city. We wish to warn against such a policy and its consequences, and urge the international community to assume its responsibilities.

First and foremost, we urge the Security Council to ensure that the historical and legal nature of Al-Quds Al-Sharif is respected and that its Christian and Muslim holy sites are not violated. Israel is maintaining its settlement policy and, at the same time, depriving Palestinians of their right to build on their lands. The recent decision of the occupation authorities to destroy eight villages in order to build an Israeli training camp is yet another manifestation of the defiant and provocative policy carried out by Israel.

We reaffirm the need for Israel to put an end to such practices, and we thank the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and all organizations that back the right of the Palestinians to build homes and facilities on their own land. We also condemn acts of violence and intimidation against Palestinians by settlers in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Israel continues to impose its blockade on the Gaza Strip, which has lasted for years now and deprives the inhabitants of Gaza of all forms of livelihood and well-being. The decisions of the Security Council and the Quartet are important in that respect, and we invite them to step in to put an end to the settlement policy, including the seizure of Palestinian land in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, especially now that the Levy Commission has reaffirmed that Palestinian lands are not occupied or settled. That added insult to injury, with blatant disregard for all international resolutions and laws.

Furthermore, Israel's intransigence and the failure of the international community to implement the vision of a two-State solution make the resumption of the peace process almost impossible. The Quartet's decision to send a special envoy to encourage the parties to make specific proposals regarding territory, borders and security has yielded no palpable results. The political stalemate benefits no one, including Israel. To the contrary, a final legal solution to the Palestinian issue would promote peace, security, stability and prosperity in the entire region, including Israel.

We cherish the hope of seeing Palestinian national reconciliation and hope that the obstacles to it will be eliminated. We are aware that Palestinian unity will strengthen the position of Palestinian negotiators. We have spoken at length of the Palestinian issue, because it lies at the very heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict and because the likelihood of a resolution, unfortunately, is currently being threatened from all sides.

That does not mean that we are not concerned about or do not understand the severity of the situation in Syria, which has dominated the Council's agenda of late. What is very important in that case is the occupation of the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon by the Israeli armed forces. That occupation must be brought to an end. Morocco, like all other Arab States, is committed to seeing a negotiated, just and comprehensive solution that will afford the Palestinian people a viable, independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and that would guarantee the security and safety of all States in the region.

Mr. Wittig (Germany): At the outset, I would like to thank Special Coordinator Robert Serry for his briefing and his dedicated work.

Let me start with a word on the heinous terrorist attack in Bulgaria last week. Like the whole Council, Germany has condemned in the strongest terms that attack, which targeted Israeli citizens. We are looking forward to the results of the ongoing investigation. Those responsible for the attack must be found and brought to justice. We extend our condolences to the families of the victims.

Before I turn to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, let me first address the situation in Syria. Last week, the double veto against the draft resolution on Syria marked a decisive split in the Council. The Council has failed once again to assume its responsibility. It has not been able to agree on clear messages — neither to Damascus, that the use of heavy weapons must stop, nor to the people of Syria, that the Council fully supports Kofi Annan's effort to solve the crisis politically.

As I said last week, the Syrian people will pay the price for this failure. Not only has the use of heavy weapons increased, but we now hear reports that even fighter jets are being used in the Syrian regime's onslaught on its own people. Our agreement to extend the mandate of the United Nations Supervision Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (UNSMIS) should not be seen as a whitewash of the Council's failure. The agreement does not reflect consensus in the Council; it is merely the lowest common denominator.

We continue to believe that the Syrian regime must face consequences if it continues to trample on international law and its own promises. We are very worried about the prospect of a civil war in Syria, and we urge all Council members to do their utmost not to put the efforts of the Joint Special Envoy, Kofi Annan, in peril.

The Al-Assad authorities are not only unleashing heavy weapons and gunships against their own people; two days ago, they even went a step further, making threats to the international community of the use of chemical and biological weapons. Such a threat is ruthless and inhumane. The international community has strongly, and rightly, condemned that threat, which my Foreign Minister described as monstrous. We will continue to hold the Syrian authorities fully accountable for any use of such weapons and for the safety of their storage. We reiterate our call to all those within the Syrian regime to reconsider their options. One day there will be a new Syria. One day there will be accountability for their deeds. And one day they may wish they had taken the right decision for themselves, their families and the future of their own country.

The increasing number of refugees from Syria into neighbouring countries shows clearly the serious regional repercussions of the conflict there. Germany commends Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey for offering refuge to civilians fleeing Syria. My country has increased its humanitarian assistance to those refugees. Another cause for concern is the entry last week of Syrian armed forces into the area of separation, in violation of the disengagement agreement between Israeli and Syrian forces. We welcome the fact that the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force has liaised with all sides in an effort to prevent an escalation of the situation.

Let me now turn to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Last month saw another spike in rocket attacks from Gaza. The situation on the Sinai has become more difficult. While fully recognizing Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, we continue to call on all sides to exercise the utmost restraint in that volatile regional situation, and to consider the humanitarian consequences of all use of force.

Lasting security in the Middle East can be achieved only by addressing the root causes of the conflict. An end to that conflict, which will bring to an end the occupation and allow all the people of the region to live in security and realize their aspirations to freedom and self-determination, can be reached only through a negotiated, two-State solution. The basis for that two-State solution must therefore not be allowed to erode further. Germany has been following with concern recent decisions on settlement expansion and Government subsidies for developing settlements, as well as the discussion of the status of certain settlement outposts. Let me be clear: international humanitarian law applies to the entirety of the occupied territories. The road map obliges Israel to dismantle all outposts erected since March 2001. They cannot be legalized. All settlements are illegal under international law. We are also worried about the increasing number of acts of violence committed by settlers, including attacks involving firearms.

The social and economic development of Area C is critical to the viability of a future Palestinian State.

We are worried by recent reports about Israeli plans to demolish eight Palestinian villages in Area C so that the area can be used for military training. Together with our European partners, we have engaged in a dialogue with the Israeli authorities with the aim of preventing demolitions, improving the efficiency, transparency and accountability of planning and permission procedures, and increasing Palestinian participation. We support and are in close liaison with the efforts and work of the Quartet representative and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Area C.

Germany follows the human rights situation on both sides of the Middle East conflict with close attention. We have urged Israel to abide by all its obligations founded in international law. Conversely, we have urged the Palestinian Authority to address human rights concerns, particularly those regarding the security forces. The recent death sentences carried out by the de facto authorities in the Gaza Strip are unacceptable.

The resumption of substantive negotiations on final status issues is the only way to make progress towards a solution. Those negotiations will be difficult and will require painful concessions from both sides. They therefore need an environment of mutual trust. Palestinians must be able to believe that the Israeli Government truly wants a two-State solution and is ready to make the necessary concessions. And Israelis must be able to believe that they have a partner on the other side that is interested in solving the conflict once and for all in a way that will provide security.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his briefing this morning, and the Palestinian and Israeli representatives for their contributions to today's debate.

First, I would like to express the United Kingdom's deepest condolences to the families and friends of the victims of last week's terrorist attack on Israeli tourists in Bulgaria, and to emphasize our condemnation of such inexcusable acts.

The crisis in Syria has now entered its eighteenth month. Despite the best efforts of Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan, the Syrian regime has refused to implement a single aspect of his six-point plan. It has ignored the decisions of the Council enshrined in resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012). Instead, it has intensified its brutal repression, killed almost 20,000 Syrians and detained, tortured, raped and abused innocent men, women and children. The regime continues the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of heavy weapons, in violation of international law, resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012), the six-point plan and its own commitments. The recent reports of attacks on Aleppo by the regime's fighter jets mark even further dangerous escalation and emphasize that are there are no boundaries that the Al-Assad regime will not cross in the misguided hope that it can resist the will of its people and hang on to power.

Last week's vetoes by Russia and China (see S/PV.6810) were the third example of how they are prepared to deny the Council the ability to influence the situation for the better. The consequences are clear: further violence and bloodshed, and a deteriorating situation that is now spilling over the borders and sucking in the region. Shelling across the Lebanese borders, in clear violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the Syrian military's violation of the area of limitation in the Golan Heights, are but two examples of the threat to regional stability. For our part, we will continue to work with the Envoy, the Secretary-General and responsible members of the international community to achieve the political transition that is the only way forward for Syria.

As grave as the situation is in Syria, we must not lose focus on the ongoing injustice of the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Our shared goal is a negotiated, two-State solution, based on 1967 lines; a fair solution for refugees; security arrangements that respect Palestinian sovereignty and protect Israeli security; and Jerusalem as the joint capital. We remain fully committed to that goal, and have urged both sides to focus on dialogue, avoid steps that could undermine the prospects for peace, and work towards the resumption of direct negotiations.

It is disappointing that progress towards a just and negotiated outcome looks increasingly unlikely in the near future. In the immediate term, therefore, we must guard against threats to the two-State solution and prevent further deterioration on the ground. Israeli settlement activity remains the single most serious threat to the two-State solution.

Settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the very viability of the two-State solution. We were dismayed by the announcement last month of tenders for the construction of 171 homes in settlements in East Jerusalem and the recent decision of the Israeli Ministry of Defence to reclassify the illegal outpost

of Givat Sal'it as part of an adjacent settlement. Any step that entrenches the presence of settlements in the West Bank risks sending the message that Israel is not serious in its support for a two-State solution.

Along with our European partners, we also call upon Israel to halt the demolition of Palestinian housing and infrastructure in Area C of the West Bank, and the subsequent forced transfer of the population, and to address humanitarian needs.

In the longer term, we should all maintain support for the Palestinian Authority. The United Kingdom will continue to be one of the principle supporters of Palestinian State-building efforts, assisting them to tackle poverty, build institutions and boost their economy. With our European partners, we will work to encourage Israel to accelerate approval of Palestinian master plans and to simplify administrative procedures to obtain building permits for Area C of the West Bank.

Without control over that land, including planning, building and security, the viability of a future Palestinian State, and thus the two-State solution, is significantly reduced. We continue to value the essential work that the United Nations and its agencies, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, carry out on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territories. We hope that such work can continue without hindrance.

We remain concerned about the situation in Gaza and will continue to press the Israeli Government to ease restrictions on movement and access. Although we understand Israel's security concerns, we believe that for any peace deal to be sustainable, there must be an economically viable Gaza. At the same time, rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel must stop. The recent escalation in such attacks only further entrenches the status quo.

We continue to witness change and the struggle for change across the Middle East. Achieving a peaceful and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not only secure peace and security for the parties directly involved, but also be beneficial to the region as a whole. We will continue to urge both sides to show the political leadership and courage required to make progress towards that shared goal of a two-State solution.

Mr. Sangqu (South Africa): My delegation wishes to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his briefing to the Council today. My delegation associates itself with the statement to be delivered later today by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. We also thank the representatives of Palestine and Israel for their contribution to the briefing this morning.

The blockade of Gaza by Israel has now entered its sixth year. There does not appear to be even a glimmer of hope that the Israeli Government will lift the blockade that has stifled socio-economic growth and affected the humanitarian conditions of the Gazan population. Despite repeated calls for Israel to lift the blockade, it has continued its defiance of international law with impunity. Israel must adhere to the international community's demand for it to end the illegal blockade that has exacerbated the suffering of ordinary civilians. Such a blockade and the attendant restrictions imposed on essential materials entering Gaza are in violation of international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, and are contrary to the will of the international community, as expressed in resolutions 242 (1968), 338 (1973) and 1515 (2003), as well as the Arab Peace Initiative.

We welcome the socio-economic progress in the occupied Palestinian territories mentioned in the 2012 report of the Director-General of the International Labour Organization, entitled "The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories". However, we are deeply concerned about the report's worrying conclusion that the overall framework remains grim, primarily because of the realities of the occupation and the unabated expansion of Israeli settlements.

In that regard, we believe that it is the obligation of the international community, especially the Security Council, to use the variety of measures at its disposal to ensure that the occupation of Palestine, in general, and the blockade of Gaza, in particular, be immediately stopped. The Palestinians deserve better. South Africa applauds the various United Nations agencies for their efforts to assist the Palestinians as they struggle to survive the Israeli military occupation.

South Africa once again condemns the continued settlement construction in the West Bank, and in East Jerusalem in particular, which violates international law and the resolutions of this Council. Again, it is deplorable that the Council, which has moved with commendable speed on conflict situations elsewhere in the world, has been unable, and sometimes unwilling, to end those illegal actions.

Equally, we condemn the continued demolition of Palestinian property and the violence carried out by Israeli settlers against the Palestinian population in the occupied Palestinian West Bank. Manifest to that illegal practice are the recent reports of Israel seeking the authority to demolish eight Palestinian hamlets in the South Hebron Hills, opening the way for Israeli military training operations. The latest figures released by the United Nations, which indicate a significant loss of farmland and fishing waters in Palestine, further undermining sustainable economic activity, are also a cause for great concern.

On the issue of Palestinian political prisoners, South Africa welcomes Israel's decision to allow family visits to Palestinians held in Israeli jails. The efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross in facilitating those visits are commendable. However, we urge the Israeli Government to fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law by ensuring the prisoners' safety and welfare, including by respecting their basic human rights.

We condemn the assault, torture, killing and deportation of African migrants in Israel, which constitute human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. Gravely concerned about such atrocities, the Assembly of the African Union, at its nineteenth ordinary session held recently, reminded Israel of its obligation under the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1961 United Nations Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. We hope that the Israeli Government will prosecute those responsible for abuses against African migrants and adhere to its international humanitarian law obligations.

Regarding the political process, South Africa remains concerned about the lack of significant progress. However, we note the ongoing low-level talks between Israelis and Palestinians, especially on confidence-building measures, which, if successful, may lay the ground for the resumption of the long-awaited direct negotiations.

We have heard expressions of concern, including by some members of the Council, about the efficacy of the Quartet. The United Nations is a member of the Quartet but it is unclear to us what value it adds to its equation. We believe that there is a serious need to take a step back and assess the utility of the Quartet in its current make-up with a view to consolidating its gains, correcting its mistakes and weaknesses, and possibly reconfiguring or even disbanding it, if needs be.

We encourage the Palestinian parties to forge ahead with their reconciliation efforts. The role that Egypt continues to play in that regard is most welcome. We encourage the parties to proceed rapidly with preparations for the upcoming local elections, which, we hope, will enhance democracy and ensure that internal Palestinian unity is sustained.

The brutal attacks on Israeli tourists in Bulgaria on 18 July are deplorable. South Africa strongly condemns them. We support the call to bring to justice those responsible for the attacks.

On Syria, we remain extremely concerned that the violence continues unabated, with no sign of adherence to the Annan plan. South Africa reiterates its position that the only hope for the people of Syria is a Syrian-led dialogue, aimed at a peaceful political transition that reflects the will of the people. The only way forward is the six-point plan as proposed by Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan. Again, we call on the parties to stop the fighting and violence and to immediately begin negotiations. Failing to start negotiations immediately will result in the already dire situation further spiralling out of control. Such a development would have a severe impact on the stability of the entire region.

In conclusion, we welcome the Arab League's decision to revive Palestine's bid for United Nations membership. Restating the continent's support of the Palestinian cause, the Assembly of the African Union, at its nineteenth ordinary session, underscored that "full membership of the United Nations is a right to be enjoyed by all sovereign States" and reaffirmed Africa's support to the two-State solution.

Evidently, it is not enough that the Security Council meets every few months in the Chamber merely to restate our widely known positions on this agenda item. South Africa calls on the international community to seriously exert its energies and channel its resources towards a permanent and sustainable political solution, namely, the implementation of a two-State solution, providing for the establishment of a viable Palestinian State, existing side by side in peace with Israel within internationally recognized borders, based on those existing on 4 June 1967, prior to the outbreak of the so-called Six-Day War between Arab States and Israel, and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Tarar (Pakistan): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's debate.

Pakistan aligns itself with the statements to be delivered by the Permanent Representatives of Egypt and Kazakhstan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

We in the Security Council hold monthly consultations on the Middle East, followed by these quarterly open debates. The idea is to remain abreast of the situation through closed consultations and by listening to the views of non-members on how to proceed in the open debates. We all agree that this is the core issue in the Middle East. Without its resolution, comprehensive peace will continue to elude the region. Yet, the Middle East peace process has stalled, and we see no serious effort towards its resumption. Well-established terms of reference of the peace process, including the Arab peace Initiative and Security Council resolutions, provide an elaborate framework. It is the political will of one of the parties that continues to stymie us and, as a consequence, the prospects of peace in the region.

The current situation gives rise to questions about the role of the major actors, including the Security Council and the Quartet. What is the role of the Quartet? Is it doing justice to the task entrusted to it? Similarly, why do countries that have influence over the intransigent party not use that influence to nudge it towards a resumption of the process? While we continue to dither, the region is in turmoil. Without a clear road map, chances of escalation remain high. The Security Council must act now. Otherwise, the situation may spiral totally out of control.

The Security Council continues to pay lip service to the plight of Palestinians while they continue to languish in abysmal conditions. According to the conclusions of a study called "Children in Military Custody" conducted by a team of British lawyers and funded by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the occupying Power imprisons hundreds of Palestinian children and is in blatant breach of a number of provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Two legal systems continue to be in operation in the occupied lands. This year's report (S/2012/261) of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict draws several conclusions. How can the rights of Palestinians be protected under such unethical policies? The Palestinians just marked five years since the imposition of Israel's illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip. According to United Nations estimates, 44 per cent of the Palestinians in Gaza are food insecure, and 80 per cent are aid dependent. Unemployment remains high, and 38 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line. While the collective punishment of 1.6 million Palestinians continues unabated, in flagrant violation of resolution 1860 (2009), the Security Council remains paralysed and indecisive.

Does the international community think that inaction will somehow lead to a resolution of the problem on its own? Earlier, we proposed, and today reiterate, that the Secretariat should present the Council with a matrix on the implementation status of resolutions adopted by the Council on the Palestinian question, beginning with resolution 1860 (2009). It is only logical for the Council to review the implementation of its own resolutions and consider appropriate steps to address non-compliance.

With the further intensification of the illegal settlement campaign, it has again become evident that prospects for a two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders are being eroded. The announcement in June of plans to construct additional units and to grant subsidies for homes in the West Bank settlements, backtracking on promises made earlier this year to deny such incentives, are further proof of that mindset.

A report prepared by the Economic and Social Council of West Asia on people living in the occupied Palestinian territory states that Israel persists in exploiting and endangering natural resources in the territories. In addition, Palestinians and Syrians living under occupation continue to suffer from discrimination with respect to the allotment of water. The Human Rights Council has established a fact-finding mission to investigate those issues further. We hope that it will be allowed to undertake its mandated task.

The question of a visit by the Security Council to the occupied Palestinian territory remains on the Council's agenda. The visit, we feel, would not only provide Member States with an opportunity to observe conditions on the ground; it would also restore much needed attention and focus on the part of the international community to that festering sore. The Council should have responded positively to the Palestinian invitation.

Pakistan supports lasting peace for all inhabitants of the Middle East. That is not possible without the full

withdrawal of Israel from all occupied lands, including those of Lebanon and the Syrian Golan.

The solution to Syria's internal situation lies in a Syrian-led political process and the framework of the Council's resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012). The consensus adoption of resolution 2059 (2012) provides an opportunity for all sides to commit to peace and for all quarters to use their influence to genuinely support the Special Envoy's plan.

The denial of the Palestinian's right to self-determination remains at the heart of unrest in the region.

Many speakers have mentioned the Arab Spring. In our view, the essence of the Arab Spring, which is the fulfilment of legitimate aspirations through peaceful means, is of direct relevance to the Palestinian question. It should be a reason to do away with the lethargy and intransigence, and serve as the prime mover for concerted actions to finally resolve a dispute that has been hanging fire [at risk of exploding unexpectedly] for decades.

Our ultimate objective is the creation of an independent sovereign and viable Palestinian State. We welcome the backing of the League of Arab States for a Palestinian plan to ask for United Nations recognition of the State of Palestine. We remain ready and willing to assist.

Mr. Menan (Togo) (*spoke in French*): I would like to associate myself with previous speakers in thanking Mr. Robert Serrry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East. I also thank the representatives of Palestine and Israel for their statements.

On the occasion of this debate, I shall limit my statement to addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the situation in Syria. Before I do so, I should like to reiterate my country's firm condemnation of the cowardly act of terrorism perpetrated against Israeli tourists on 18 July in Bulgaria, killing and wounding a number of individuals. We again extend our condolences to the Governments of Israel and Bulgaria, and to the families of the victims. We wish the wounded a speedy recovery.

The situation on the ground in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has seen no significant progress since the Council's most recent meeting on this issue (see S/PV.6788). There remain concerns arising from the unilateral initiatives and provocations of both parties, which continue to erode trust and confidence. Indeed, during the reporting period settlement activities did not stop. They include permits issued for new settlement construction and the expulsion of Palestinian families, including refugees, from their homes, including in Beit Hanina.

Togo believes that the Israeli authorities should take appropriate steps not only to put an end to acts of violence committed by settlers, but also to bring their perpetrators to justice. In that regard, we welcome the decision taken by the Israeli Supreme Court to order the expulsion of settlers who had forcibly occupied houses in Beit Hanina. We note that, as a result of this decision, the settler families announced in June that they would leave voluntarily. My country also congratulates the Israeli Parliament, which, on 6 June, rejected a draft law that would have retroactively authorized settler homes built on private Palestinian land. These brave steps are likely to help to ease tensions and should be continued in order to create a climate conducive to the resumption of direct negotiations, which we fervently hope to see.

In that context, we believe that the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip does not contribute to a resumption of the negotiating process. We therefore invite Israel to lift the blockade, pursuant to resolution 1860 (2009). We also urge Israel not to impede the reconstruction of damaged or destroyed infrastructure and to approve suspended projects of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations agencies in the region, including in the field of construction. Furthermore, we remain concerned by the issue of political prisoners. While we welcome the recent release of a number of these, we believe that the parties should continue negotiations to progressively expand this programme to all remaining detainees.

We urge Israel to put an end to the reprehensible actions of the settlers, lift the blockade of Gaza and work for peace, but we also express our deep concerns over the ongoing launching of rockets at Israel from Gaza and all acts of violence and provocation by Hamas and associated groups aimed against Israel.

The Palestinian Authority — whose encouraging progress in the West Bank in many fields, especially that of security, we commend — should pursue its efforts

within the framework of reconciliation with Hamas to prompt that organization to renounce violence and join initiatives aimed at achieving a comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through dialogue and negotiation. My country has always believed that the path of dialogue is the best possible option for achieving a lasting settlement of the issue, and urges the parties to accord it pride of place, despite its proven limitations — which, it should be said in passing, are the result of deficient political will and formal commitment on the part of both sides.

In that respect, Togo again urges the Quartet to continue its efforts to lead the parties to resume direct negotiations, and welcomes the commitment of Jordan to this matter and encourages that country to continue to work for the timely resumption of direct negotiations.

As to Syria, my country remains extremely concerned by the violence that continues to rage throughout the country. The refusal of the Government and the opposition to implement the six-point plan of the Joint Special Envoy, Mr. Kofi Annan, and resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012) has pushed the country into civil war. Togo believes that the Council's inability to speak with one voice has greatly contributed to this situation, which is now beyond the United Nations control. Although we welcome the adoption of resolution 2059 (2012) on 20 July, extending the mandate of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria by a month, we are forced to note that it has had a minimal impact on events, so strong is the compulsion of the parties to fight it out. The announced withdrawal of half of the observers is proof of the Mission's current inability to operate on the ground.

It is not too late, however, for the Council to shoulder its responsibilities before the mandate expires, as the Syrian crisis now poses a challenge to all humankind and represents a failure of the international community, and above all the Security Council, which, let us recall, bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Far from throwing in the towel, the entire world should continue to seek a solution to the Syrian crisis. Countries that have proven influence on the parties should bring greater pressure to bear in order to persuade them to end the hostilities and prioritize dialogue based on the six-point plan and the Final Communiqué adopted in Geneva on 30 June (S/2012/522, annex). The Syrian-led formation of a Government of national unity remains the best way to overcome the crisis. To that end, we welcome the recent announcement in the media that the Syrian opposition is ready to accept a transitional Government led by a member of the Al-Assad regime.

The current situation in Syria gives rise to genuine fears regarding the spread of war to neighbouring States. The inter-communal clashes of the past month in Tripoli, Lebanon, and the incursions of Syrian soldiers into the Golan Heights, in violation of the 1974 accord, further exacerbate those fears. My country is also alarmed by the recent threat of the use of chemical and bacteriological weapons by the Syrian authorities. We urge the Syrian Government to exercise restraint, act responsibly and preserve the fragile regional security.

Finally, Togo urges all parties to avoid exporting the war beyond Syria's borders and invites the countries of the region to continue to work with the Syrians for a negotiated settlement to the conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Colombia.

I have already thanked Mr. Serry for his very thorough and thoughtful briefing. In my capacity as President of the Security Council, on 19 July I disseminated a statement issued by this organ condemning in the most severe terms the terrorist attack on Israeli tourists in Bulgaria, in which Israeli and Bulgarian nationals died and many were wounded. My country reaffirms its total repudiation of that heinous act, and reiterates its condolences to the families of the victims.

Colombia has always clearly and precisely articulated its vision of a Palestinian State living in peace with Israel within internationally recognized, defined and secure borders resulting from an agreement that guarantees coexistence between the two peoples. We therefore reiterate today that negotiations between the two parties are the only viable path to a comprehensive, structured and lasting solution.

We support the work of the Middle East Quartet, and most specifically the platform for seeking a definitive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict based on resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003), 1850 (2008), the Madrid principles, and the road map laid out in the Quartet statement of 23 September 2011. We regret that, notwithstanding the individual and collective efforts of members of the Quartet and various countries of the region, the parties have not

been able to overcome the existing obstacles or renew direct bilateral negotiations without prior preconditions so that talks could be successful. It is urgent to create confidence-building measures.

I find relevant Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's comment, in his message to participants at the United Nations Asian and Pacific Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, held in Bangkok on 10 July, that

> "recent actions on the ground have not contributed to a conducive environment for dialogue. Israel has continued settlement activity, contrary to international law and its commitments under the Road Map."

In addition, the Palestinian reconciliation process taking place in the context of the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization, under the leadership of President Abbas, continues to be a crucial element in achieving lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis. We believe that a unified Palestinian Government is essential to achieving two States based on the principles of mutual acknowledgement and peaceful coexistence.

While efforts continue to rekindle peace talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis, my country believes it to be of the utmost importance to renew efforts to strengthen the financial position of the Palestinian Authority and to revitalize the Palestinian economy. In order to achieve sustained economic growth and create jobs in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, there is a need for efforts aimed at increasing investor confidence and unleashing the enormous potential of the Palestinian private sector.

The international community should promote respect for human rights and the protection of all Palestinian and Israeli civilians without exception. That includes a halt to the launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel. There is no justification whatever for such indiscriminate attacks against civilians. Both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples have a right to live in peace and security with dignity, free from fear of indiscriminate violence.

The Syrian crisis constitutes a flagrant threat to the peace and security of the region, where conditions are already fragile and in a state of alert. We therefore deplore the impotence of the Security Council to act in a tougher manner, with a view to halting the violence and bloodshed and facilitating a political solution.

I would like to draw attention to the effects of the devastating tragedy that Syria is experiencing when it comes to providing stability, protection and humanitarian access to the 500,000 refugees living in that country. The inability to be able to effectively ensure the protection of the humanitarian personnel and facilities in Syria of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is a matter of concern. We call on all the parties to take the necessary measures to save lives, avoid forced displacements and ensure the protection of Palestinian refugees trapped in the armed conflict taking place in Syria. The neutrality and integrity of the facilities of the United Nations in areas where Palestinians and other civilians are living should also be respected.

In conclusion, we are alarmed about the incidents taking place along the Syrian-Lebanese border, as they violate the sovereignty, independence and territorial and political integrity of Lebanon, including the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. We should maintain our firm commitment to support the Government of President Sleiman and Prime Minister Mikati in meeting their humanitarian obligations vis-à-vis Syrians who have sought refuge in Lebanon. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are 30,000 such refugees, with 2,500 awaiting registration.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to first thank Mr. Robert Serry for his comprehensive briefing.

I should like to reiterate Lebanon's insistence on the full implementation of the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006). I would also like to pay tribute to the commendable efforts of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

I would also like to emphasize to the Security Council that Lebanon continues to adhere to its principled position in defence of Syria's unity and sovereignty, as well as the right of the Syrian people to live in dignity and freedom and enjoy safety and security.

Allow me now to turn to the main topic on our meeting today, namely, the Arab-Israeli conflict and its repercussions.

The Council may be aware that, the day before yesterday, Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak approved a decision to demolish eight villages south of Hebron, in the occupied West Bank. Those are villages, in which Palestinian Arabs have lived for more than 200 years, include Majaz, Tabban, Safti, Fakheit, Halaweh, Mirkez, Jinba and Kharuba. The decision will result in the expulsion of more than 1,500 people, on the pretext that the Israeli army needs the land for military exercises. This is a step aimed at appropriating more Palestinian territory and establishing another buffer zone in the southern West Bank, along the Blue Line. Ultimately, this will serve to displace people and destroy their property.

As a country that upholds the Charter of the United Nations, we are duty-bound to recall that the Security Council must play its full role in the maintenance of international peace and security. Does the Council intend to take any steps to put an end to such Israeli actions? What are those steps? Or will the Council remain paralysed, its will held hostage in the face of ongoing Israeli violations of the provisions of international law and its total disregard for the resolutions of the Council and the General Assembly?

The Council may well be aware that the committee established by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and led by retired Supreme Court Justice Edmund Levy, to consider the legal status of Israeli outposts in the West Bank and find a way to legalize them concluded in its report issued earlier this month that Israel was "not an occupying State from the perspective of international law" and that "all settlement activities are legitimate, in particular those described as 'illegitimate'". The Levy committee recommended that settlers be given property rights and that a parallel Israeli land cadastre be established for them. It also called for the revocation of the Jordanian land law, which is valid in the West Bank, as well as for the revocation of the Israeli Supreme Court decision of 1979, so as to facilitate the building of settlements and the exercise by Jews of settlers' rights all over Judea and Samaria.

A comment in the Levy committee report made by Michael Sfard, a lawyer and legal adviser to the Israeli human rights organization Yesh Din, expressed the eloquent view that,

(*spoke in English*)

> "The Levy committee was conceived in sin to legalize a crime, and it has fully accomplished its mission. Its report is not a legal report but an ideological report that ignores the basic principles of the rule of law. The members of the Levy committee apparently fell down the rabbit hole, and their report was written in Wonderland, governed by the rules of absurdity: there is no occupation, there are no illegal outposts and there is apparently no Palestinian people either. To that we must say in the words of Alice: 'This is the silliest tea party I have ever been to'".

In the same context, Aeyal Gross wrote, on 10 July, in an editorial on the report of the Levy committee in *Haaretz*:

> "What would you call an occupation where the occupying State moves its citizens in as inhabitants while exploiting ground, water and other natural resources? And what would you call a regime where two populations live under different law, applied according to their nationality? If any good could come out of the Levy committee, it is the unveiling of the hypocrisy that under the perception of occupation lies a regime which better resembles a combination of colonialism and apartheid."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Faced with the gravity of the recommendations and the discussions of the Levy committee, allow me to ask, once again, are there any steps that members intend to take in the Council to recall the provisions of international law and the resolutions of the Council and the General Assembly on the illegitimacy of settler activities, or will the Council remain paralysed with its will held hostage?

We have frequently recalled before the Council that article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War states that "The occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies."

We have also recalled repeatedly that the Security Council, in paragraph 1 of resolution 446 (1979), adopted more than 30 years ago, after recalling the fact

that the Fourth Geneva Convention applied to Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967, determined that

> "the policy and practices of Israel in establishing settlements in the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967 have no legal validity and constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East."

Do I really need to recall that the International Court of Justice decided in its advisory opinion on the *Legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory* that

> "The Court concludes that the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory (including East Jerusalem) have been established in breach of international law". (*A/ES-10/273, advisory opinion, para. 120*)

The legal provisions on settlements are very clear, as they are with regard to the ongoing Israeli practices since 1967, which themselves are in defiance of those same provisions. The number of settlers exceeds half a million. The more than 120 settlements, to say nothing of the outposts, the bypass roads and the camps, have devoured approximately 42 per cent of the territory of the West Bank. Our question remains: how long will the Council continue to be paralysed, its will held hostage, failing in the face of Israeli settlement activity to shoulder its responsibilities under Article XXIV of the Charter of the Nations?

Mr. Khalil (Egypt): I have the honour to address the Security Council today on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. At the outset, I would like to express the Movement's appreciation to Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, for his briefing to the Council.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains firm in its conviction of the urgent need for the international community to act resolutely and collectively to fulfil its longstanding commitment to, and responsibility for, the realization of a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a just solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects, on the basis of international law and the terms of reference of the peace process, including the resolutions of the Council. The independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is long overdue. Its continued postponement will only put that goal further out of reach.

The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its view that serious international action in a timely manner is required. The window of opportunity for implementing the two-State solution, based on the 4 June 1967 borders, is rapidly closing. The Movement recalls, in that regard, that the application submitted by Palestine, on 23 September 2011, for membership in the United Nations is consistent with the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and independence. The Movement looks forward to the Security Council's assumption of its responsibility to take action in a manner that recognizes the legitimate and historic rights of the Palestinian people and contributes to the peace efforts.

The Movement regrets that all efforts exerted to date by international and regional parties, including by the Quartet, have been unable to achieve any progress owing to the deliberate obstruction by Israel, the occupying Power, its refusal to respect the parameters of the peace process and its insistence on continuing to change the facts on the ground, in total contradiction of the two-State solution, the Charter of the United Nations and international law. Those Israeli policies were described by President Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine during his visit to Egypt on 18 July as shutting the door on the political process.

The Movement strongly condemns Israel's illegal measures in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, particularly its construction and expansion of settlements and the separation wall, the confiscation of Palestinian land, the displacement of the Palestinian civilian population, and the persistent attempts to legitimize the illegal settlement activities, as demonstrated recently by a report commissioned by the Israeli Government, the so-called Levy Committee report, which suggested that the West Bank was not occupied territory and that the settlements were therefore legal. The Movement stresses that those actions must be ended, as they undermine the resumption of credible negotiations and obstruct the achievement of a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the light of the very difficult conditions on the ground, the Non-Aligned Movement calls once again for the implementation of the recommendations made by Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to the Security Council on 18 January 2012 on the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. Specific measures are necessary to address, in particular, the grave impact of Israel's settlement policies on the Palestinian people and their land, including the violent actions by Israeli settlers against Palestinian property and Palestinian civilians, including women and children, as well as provocations and incitement, including against holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem and the vandalizing of mosques and churches.

The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its call for the Security Council to act, and demands that Israel, the occupying Power, immediately cease all such violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, and fully abide by its legal obligations, including those under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel's blatant impunity and disregard for the law cannot be tolerated.

The Movement remains concerned about the critical humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. We call once again for the full and immediate lifting of the illegal Israeli blockade, which has now entered its sixth year, in violation of resolution 1860 (2009), other relevant United Nations resolutions and international humanitarian law, which prohibits collective punishment of the civilian population under occupation. Israel must promptly and unconditionally open all its crossing points with Gaza and end its continued obstruction of the freedom of movement of persons and of the reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip.

The Movement also takes this opportunity to express its support for Palestinian reconciliation efforts, which continue to be sponsored by Egypt, and hopes that Palestinian unity will soon be restored in the interest of the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people. The Movement looks forward to that achievement and to the holding of Palestinian legislative and presidential elections.

Turning to Lebanon, the Movement condemns Israel's ongoing violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and calls on all parties concerned to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006), in order to end the current fragility and avoid the resurgence of hostilities.

Concerning the occupied Syrian Golan, the Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken, or to be taken, by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israeli measures to impose its own jurisdiction and administration there, are null, void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

I shall now speak in my national capacity. Egypt would like to emphasize the importance we attach to the work of United Nations agencies in support of the Palestinian people, particularly through addressing the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, which is gravely impacted by Israeli policies in general and its settlement policies in particular. In that regard, Egypt is deeply concerned by the restrictions that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to impose on the work of the United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory, as demonstrated recently by the letter dated 10 July 2012 addressed to Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, by the representative of Israel. United Nations agencies working in the occupied territory should not yield to pressure on the part of the occupying Power to prevent them from fulfilling their mandates to support the Palestinian people.

It is no surprise that Israel does not feel comfortable with the work and the mere presence of the United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory. An occupying Power that decides to demolish eight villages in the territory it is occupying under the pretext that the land of those villages will be used by the occupying forces for training exercises, as was ordered by the Israeli Defence Minister on 22 July, is an occupying force that will use all measures at its disposal to avoid being held accountable for its illegal actions and to continue to enjoy impunity as it has benefited from for decades.

One flagrant measure was the letter addressed by the representative of Israel in Geneva to the President of the Human Rights Council officially stating that Israel had decided to suspend its relationship with that Council and with the Office of the Office of the High

Commissioner for Human Rights, both in Geneva and in Jerusalem. Such actions should not be allowed to pass without repercussions.

The Middle East has seen dramatic changes over the past 18 months. The aspirations of the peoples of many Arab countries for freedom, democracy and social justice are on the rise. They are going to prevail. The situation in Syria is no exception in that regard. Egypt welcomes the attention given by the international community to the developments in the region, including the Syrian crisis, aimed at finding a settlement based on the six-point plan, especially ending the violence, protecting civilians and respecting Syria's unity and territorial integrity. However, that should not be at the expense of addressing the historic injustice that the Palestinian people have endured for decades. It should not divert attention from the Palestinian question, which remains the principal source of instability in the region. As many Arab countries chart their way towards democracy and good governance, the promise of a peaceful and stable Middle East cannot be achieved without finding a just and lasting peaceful settlement that ensures the independence of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It is time for the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and work seriously to achieve that objective.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Obhrai (Canada): On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to thank the Colombian presidency for convening today's open debate on the Middle East.

There are dark clouds gathering over the Middle East. The region is more volatile and unstable than it has been in years. We face multiple and serious challenges to regional and global peace and security. From barbaric acts of terrorism aimed at Israel, as we witnessed in Bulgaria last week, to the senseless slaughter of civilians perpetrated by extremists in Iraq; from the violence in Syria, which has the potential to spin the region into turmoil, to Iran's continued unwillingness to respond with real action to address our concerns about its nuclear activities — it is time for the Security Council to overcome its paralysis and act with determination to protect peace and stability on behalf of all nations.

The Al-Assad regime has lost legitimacy by waging a campaign of terror on the Syrian people, who began their campaign for freedom, dignity and democracy with peaceful demonstrations. There is no future for Al-Assad in Syria. His regime is creating sectarian strife and regional instability. There are growing tensions in Lebanon and a massive outflow of refugees to Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Lebanon. Democracy based on the rule of law and respect for human rights is the best way for disparate voices to live together in peace. The Action Group on Syria in Geneva has conceived a pragmatic transition plan, building on Joint Special Envoy Annan's six-point plan. But it will not work unless those who continue to support the Al-Assad regime with arms and resources stop doing so immediately. It is past time for the Security Council to stand up for peace with universal and binding sanctions to pressure Al-Assad to honour commitments he has already made. The failure to do so during the recent debate on the renewal of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria demonstrates the tragic unwillingness of some Council members to live up to their international responsibilities.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's reports of Iranian non-compliance with its international obligations and on that country's nuclear-weapons development effort reinforce our deep concern about Iran's ambitions and the resulting consequences for regional and global security. While we acknowledge that Iran has come without preconditions to the table with the five permanent members of the Security Council plus, those talks cannot drag on forever while centrifuges continue to spin at Natanz and Fordow.

Iran needs to understand that the international community is serious, and that it is expected to take real and concrete steps to halt its nuclear-weapons development programme before any sanctions are eased. For years, Canada has implemented some of the toughest sanctions against Iran. Now, the full impact of the European Union oil embargo that began on 1 July is beginning to bite. Only through that kind of concerted action will we be able to impress on the Iranian authorities that the game is up and that the time has come to stop enrichment and comply with their international obligations.

The target of our sanctions is not the Iranian people, but rather the regime, which continues its nuclear programme in violation of international law. It is a regime that stifles free speech and access to information and religious freedom, and that denies the Iranian people a democratic voice. On behalf of those

voices that are silenced inside Iran, we will continue to speak out.

Amid this strife and instability, the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians is languishing. We wholly support the Quartet's efforts based on its statement of last September (see SG/2178), as well as Jordan's efforts to bring the parties together. But the parties themselves need to resume direct peace negotiations without delay or preconditions. Unilateral actions by either side are not helpful to a resumption of negotiations, since they prejudge the outcome. I must be clear that Canada cannot accept any renewed effort by the Palestinian Authority to change its status in the United Nations. The stakes are too high for the peace process itself, but also for the Organization, as we saw with the funding situation concerning UNESCO. Rather, both parties need to stop talking about talking, and instead roll up their sleeves, sit down and start serious negotiations towards a two-State solution. Concerted action to combat violence and incitement to violence would help to create an atmosphere conducive to negotiating peace.

Against that very dark backdrop, Egypt's first democratic presidential elections were a glimmer of light and a historic moment. My Government celebrates that tremendous achievement of the Egyptian people as a demonstration of what can happen when people are allowed to exercise their basic democratic rights. But an election is only a beginning. President Morsy faces many challenges. It will be a long road towards inclusive governance that fulfils the aspirations of all Egyptians for greater freedom, democracy and respect for the rule of law. We stand ready to support President Morsy in that regard. Indeed, one of the pressing challenges he faces is the precarious security situation in the Sinai peninsula, which has profound implications for Israel. In that regard, we welcome President Morsy's commitment to honour Egypt's international obligations and responsibilities to protect religious minorities.

The sky is indeed dark over the region, but this body can choose to exercise its power and authority and can act to support them. It is time.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Nishida (Japan): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the opportunity to address the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East.

Japan continues to be deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in Syria over the past 16 months, and profoundly deplores the death of many thousands of people as a result of the continued violence. We condemn the Syrian authorities' failure to keep their own commitments, as well as their increased use of heavy weapons and all other violations and abuses of human rights in Syria. The continuing bloodshed is totally unacceptable and must end now.

Japan has strongly supported the diplomatic efforts of the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Mr. Kofi Annan. We call upon all Syrian parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, to unconditionally and swiftly implement Mr. Annan's six-point plan. The transition plan set forth in the Action Group communiqué of June 30 must also be implemented, with the aim of bringing about a democratic and pluralistic political system.

Japan has been cooperating with its partners to urge the Syrian authorities to cease their violence and to implement concrete measures for a Syrian-led political transition, including through the framework of the Friends of Syria. Japan deems it extremely regrettable that, last week, owing to the exercise of the veto, the Security Council failed to unite and speak in one voice (see S/PV.6810), in line with other international efforts. Japan will continue to make the utmost effort at every opportunity in cooperation with like-minded countries.

Japan highly appreciates the dedicated work of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS). At the same time, Japan regrets that the Mission had to suspend its operational activities owing to the escalation of violence. As stipulated in resolution 2059 (2012), we call upon the Syrian parties to guarantee the safety and freedom of movement and access for UNSMIS personnel. We also wish to believe that the security and political environment will improve so that UNSMIS can effectively implement its mandate.

Japan is also concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation of the Syrian people. For that reason, the Government of Japan decided in May to extend an additional aid grant of $5 million in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We underline the importance of allowing humanitarian personnel full and unimpeded access to the people in need of assistance.

With regard to the Middle East peace process, Japan has supported the efforts of the Palestinians to establish an independent State, and it remains committed to providing continuous assistance in that regard. In that connection, we call upon Israel to support the fiscal stability of the Palestinian Authority, including by enabling uninterrupted tax transfers to the Palestinian Authority.

Japan firmly supports a two-State solution in which Israel and a future independent Palestinian State would live side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition. It is regrettable that direct negotiations between the parties have been suspended for nearly two years. We call upon Israel not to be satisfied with the status quo on the ground and to be positively engaged in the dialogue with the Palestinians. We would also like to remind both sides that a two-State solution can be achieved only through sincere direct negotiations between the parties concerned. Japan hopes that contact between negotiators in order to build confidence will lead to the resumption of direct negotiations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are a number of speakers remaining on my list. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the consent of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3.30 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.50 p.m.